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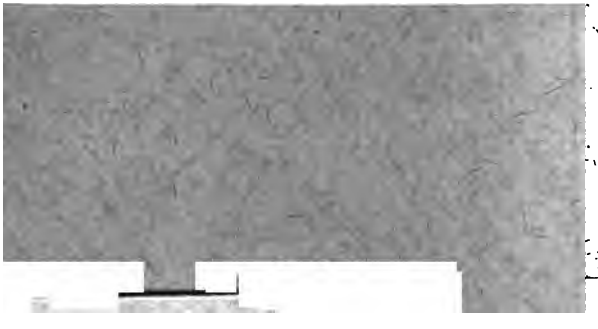

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1841

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THE

CHRISTIAN MONITOR.

NO. III.

CONTAINING

EIGHT SERMONS

ON THE

MEANS OF RELIGION.

By John Foster. D. D.

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ERRATA.

Page 14, line 10 from top, for *enure*, read *inure*. P. 17, l. 8 from bot. for *acellerate*, read *accelerate*. P. 18, l. 10 from bot. for *chistendom*, read *christendom*. P. 26, l. 5 from bot. for *serve*, read *save*. P. 28, l. 11 from top, before *inquiries*, insert *these*. P. 33, l. 9 from bot. for *to*, read *with*. P. 38, l. 10 from top, for *incontestible*, read *incontestable*. P. 40, l. 6 from bot. erase *the*. P. 48, l. 5 from top, for *this*, read *their*. P. 54, l. 8 from top, for *the*, read *thee*. P. 54, l. 21, for *irradicate*, read *eradicate*. P. 68, l. 3 from top, for *ebulitions*, read *ebullitions*. P. 93, l. 7 from top, for *Revelations*, read *Revelation*. P. 116, l. 12 from bot. for *his*, read *the*. P. 122, l. 6 from bot. for *encitement*, read *incitement*. P. 133, l. 8 from bottom for *profess* read *possess*. P. 173, l. 6 from top, for *institutions*, read *instructions*.

☞ Beside the preceding, several minor errours of the press escaped attention, in the hurry of printing: but as they are of a nature to be easily discovered by the attentive eye, and as easily corrected and pardoned, they are not particularly specified.

THE

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A RELIGIOUS

PERIODICAL WORK.

BY

"A SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, PIETY, AND CHARITY."

By John Foster.

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SERMON I.

PROVERBS ii. 4, 5.

If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

IN every message and command of heaven to men, their improvement and happiness are obviously designed. Pursuant to this design, a plan of redemption was intimated to the first offending pair, and gradually disclosed, during the patriarchal, Mosaick, and prophetick ages, till the "sun of righteousness arose with healing in his beams;" and the meridian light of gospel grace burst upon a benighted world. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem

them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Thus "begotten to a lively hope," we are furnished, at the same time, with ample instructions to form us to virtue and glory. Do we inquire "what we must do to be saved?" Evangelical faith, repentance, and obedience are defined and enforced, in reply. Would we ascertain how these essential qualifications are to be acquired and increased? All needful information is given in the various passages of scripture, which prescribe means adapted to the purpose. Of this import are the repeated injunctions to "consider our ways;" to "be instant in prayer;" to "keep the sabbath and reverence the sanctuary;" to hear and read the word; to "bridle our tongues," with many others that might be mentioned. Of this import are the more general and figurative addresses, which, by allusions to sublunary affairs, exhibit and recommend, in the aggregate, all the methods suggested by reason, or authorized by revelation, to facilitate the choice and pursuit of "the true riches." Such is the manifest intention of the inspired preacher of Israel, when he says, "My son, if thou *wilt receive* my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline

thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

To "understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God," are expressions which need no comment. Like those in the preceding grades of the climax, they evidently denote the spirit and character of true religion. Here then, the spirit and character of true religion are presented to the mind, as objects to be sought and obtained, in a manner perfectly analagous to that, in which we seek and obtain temporal good; that is, by the diligent use of proper means.

As this discourse is intended to call attention to the subject of religious means at large, and to prepare the way for others more in detail, their nature, tendency, and result may profitably employ our meditations.

1. To any one, who is conversant with the sacred pages, it will be apparent, that two kinds of duties are there enjoined; and that these duties, though ultimately tending to the same point, are perfectly distinct in their nature and ends. Of the first class, the christian

character is the proximate object ; of the last, the christian inheritance. By confounding these objects together, some are betrayed into an undue estimation of instrumental observances, while others are led to depreciate and decry them, as " nothing worth." Now the antidote to both these mistakes is carefully to discriminate between the means of religion, and religion itself. Are you inclined to place the whole of your moral obligations in the " forms of godliness," and to imagine, that in them consists a compliance with the terms of salvation? This discrimination will teach you, that the exercises which they impose, are, at best, but preludes and helps to conversion and sanctification, and can be no further beneficial than they excite devout affections of heart, and induce virtuous habits of life. Do you verge to the opposite extreme, and suspect the means of religion to be useless and criminal, except when resorted to in a believing, penitent frame of mind ? The same discrimination will apprise you, that a believing, penitent frame of mind is the identical attainment to which they are directed ; that to seek it, necessarily involves the idea of present destitution ; and therefore, that this theory inverts the order of nature, as well as the injunction

of grace, and constructively requires us, not to ask, that we may receive, but to receive, that we may ask! Driven from this untenable ground, you will perceive, on impartial examination, that attention to means, though it does not include the temper of the gospel, is nevertheless calculated to inspire it; and, in this view, is a duty, at once incumbent on man, and acceptable to God.

That this is a correct statement of the case, is evident, not only from the contents, but from the very existence, of the bible. Why is this holy book put into the hands of sinful men, but that by the perusal and contemplation of its interesting instructions, they may be "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever?" All the doctrines and precepts of inspiration imply the necessity and authorize the use of means. In what other way can we yield a voluntary assent and obedience? "How shall we believe in him of whom we have not heard? and how shall we hear without a preacher? So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

We are so constituted by the great author of our being, as to be incapable of any attain-

ment whatever, without recourse to means. In every conceivable instance, preparatory steps are to be taken. Needful information is to be gained, native reluctance to be overcome, and efficient motives to be called into action, before we can proceed with alacrity or advantage, in the most common transactions of life. Do we aspire to opulence? How much arrangement and labour must precede the acquisition! Nor are intellectual and moral improvements exempt from this general law of our nature. Excepting those only, which are prompted by natural instinct or impetuous passion, the human mind imbibes no dispositions, forms no opinions, and arrives at no conclusions, but by the previous exertion of its powers. Ask the man of science, and he will tell you, that beside the painful and persevering study, which must always be the purchase of increasing knowledge, neither time nor relish for the requisite application can be commanded without constant vigilance, self denial, and resolution. Is religion then, alone to be acquired and practised independent of our personal endeavours? No: As in secular, so in spiritual concerns, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." In secular concerns, every one feels that activity

and enterprize are indispensable to the accomplishment of his wishes: But spiritual objects, being more abstract and foreign to the senses, are liable to be viewed in a different light, as the immediate gifts of God. This, however, is a distinction no where to be found in the scriptures. They declare that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above;" nor do they more frequently, or more explicitly ascribe religious attainments to the agency of heaven, than earthly possessions. If, therefore, we discard means in the first case, reason and consistency require us to reject them in the last. But should we not, with one voice, pronounce that man delirious, who would make no exertions to provide for his safety and support, because he reads, "the Lord upholdeth all that fall; raiseth up those that be bowed down; and giveth meat in due season."

The fact is, that the means of religion bear the same relation to their appropriate end, as do the means of worldly prosperity and wealth. This I need not prove; for the differences, which exist among christians on the subject, are rather speculations of the head, than sentiments of the heart. In practice all agree. The awakened sinner, whatever may have

been his theory, scruples not to "frame his doings to turn unto the Lord." Convinced of the guilt and danger of his condition; anxious to escape "the wrath to come, and obtain the glory and happiness in reversion for the faithful, he would fain "flee for refuge and lay hold on the hope set before him." Under these impressions, though as yet the scales have not fallen from his eyes, "behold he prayeth." Whilst he asks counsel and assistance from above, he reads, hears, meditates, and converses on the important topick which has seized and absorbed his attention. Nor is he apt to mistake the nature of these exercises. If left to follow the directions of divine truth, unperplexed by metaphysical subtilties, far from conceiving them to be all that "the Lord his God requireth of him," or suspecting that they tend only to increase his criminality and wretchedness, he readily assigns them the same rank in regard to religion, which industry holds in the prosecution of earthly blessings. Persuaded by this analogy that constant circumspection and zeal are absolutely necessary to his amendment and salvation, "he gives all diligence to make his calling and election sure;" suffers neither the calls of business, nor the avocations of pleasure to turn him

aside; and with an ardour similar to that, with which silver is sought, and hid treasure explored, "labours not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat, which endureth unto everlasting life."

Should it be objected here, that to be thus desirous of embracing the overtures of mercy is in fact conversion, it is obvious to reply, that this objection is grounded on the supposition, that moral goodness consists exclusively in volition. Were this true, it would follow that every one is precisely as devout and virtuous as he wishes to be; that good men may arrive at sinless perfection by a simple act of the will; and consequently that means are useless even to them. But do not good men habitually wish and strive for degrees of holiness far beyond their highest attainments? If not, why does Paul exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" What can he mean, when he speaks of "a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind;" and affirms, "to will is present with me, but to perform that which is good I find not."

There is no person, regenerate or unregenerate, accustomed to observe what passes within himself, who has not sometimes been con-

scious of indulging passions, which he knew at the moment to be sinful, and sincerely wished to banish from his heart; yet found the wish impracticable but by strenuous and repeated struggles. Now to inspire the same convictions relative to every thing inconsistent with our obligations both to God and man; and to stimulate our efforts to "cease to do evil, and learn to do well," the means of religion are graciously designed.

2. This leads us, as proposed in the second place, to consider their tendency.

The human character is commonly, if not invariably, formed by a gradual progress. All antecedent thoughts and actions have an influence on the subsequent disposition and manners. Whatever be the course which we now take, it imperceptibly conciliates the affections, and accommodates the taste and inclination to its demands. Habit is more frequently the cause, than the effect, of deep rooted principle. Unreflecting deviations from the path of rectitude are often known to generate sentiments and views, from which their fondest votaries, before they were hackneyed in the ways of iniquity, would have recoiled with horrour. May we not conclude, by parity of reason, that a constant familiarity with instructions and

examples of piety and virtue is adapted to attach the mind to goodness? On this ground, an eminent divine of the last century* insists, that the secular arm ought to enforce the observance, and punish the neglect, of the external duties of religion. "For," says he, "though it be true that the sinner, who abstains from vice or immorality, merely out of the fear of temporal punishment, cannot be said to act upon a religious principle in so doing, or to render an acceptable service to God; yet we must consider not only the immediate influence which punishments have, but the consequences which they are naturally apt to produce. If you keep a sinner from vice through fear at first, it will by degrees grow habitual to him to do well; his relish for vice will abate; and by the length of practice, he will come to take pleasure in virtue; and whenever this change is effected, the man is truly religious: For what is a religious disposition, unless this, to take pleasure in doing well? This happy change often proceeds from less happy beginnings. We see in children every day that their propensity to some vices is gradually removed by the watchful eye and

* Bishop Sherlock.

hand of a good parent; and we may observe the same effect in men from like causes."

This opinion has obtained, at least, the practical suffrage of mankind in every age. We accordingly find that all wise and devout householders, from Abraham, the father of the faithful, to our own times, have been solicitous to shield the souls committed to their care, from the contagion of profligate associates and customs; and to enure them to an early and uniform attendance on the means of religious improvement. We find too, that the laws of every christian country require a visible respect to gospel institutions. If then a reluctant and constrained attention be capable of meliorating the heart and life, how much more efficacious must be the influence of that which is voluntary; prompted by a desire, however imperfect, to know and do the will of our heavenly father?

When we would excite any with whom we are connected to a change of conduct, in whatever respect, we consider it an important point, and a favourable omen to obtain a candid hearing. If they will so far dismiss their prepossessions as to listen impartially to the arguments and motives which we offer, and *seriously ponder* them in their hearts, we enter-

tain hopes of success; and, in many cases, we fully realize these hopes in the event. Where is the christian, who has never adopted measures of this kind with the view and expectation of reclaiming the negligent and thoughtless from the errour of their ways? On the same principle, to be conversant with the character, word, and ordinances of God, by inducing the habit of reflection and sobriety, tends to superadd a taste and relish for moral excellence. By such exercises the mind is detached from the fleeting interests of the body, and fixed on the momentous concerns of the soul. The circumstances of our being, as "strangers on the earth," and candidates for eternity, are called into view; and the strongest incentives to "lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come," are suggested and pressed home to the heart. Penetrated with a deep sense of our duty and destination, we are convinced of the necessity and advantage of acceptance with God; and impelled by that instinctive dread of misery and desire of happiness, which are wisely implanted in every human breast, to exert our utmost abilities to be "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." These powerful springs of action are

unequivocally addressed and authorized in all the threatenings and promises of inspiration; and, therefore, however defective, when brought to the test of evangelical perfection, are certainly innocent. Precisely the same motives are designated by the exhortation to seek religion "as silver and search for her as for hid treasure." Our Saviour accordingly invites us to "learn of him," and asserts the condition of those, who are attentive to his instructions, to be far more hopeful and promising on that account. To the scribe, whose discreet answers evinced the docility of his mind, he declares, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God;" words which can intend nothing less, than that, by his inquiries after truth and duty, he had already made considerable approaches towards the christian character, and obtained a brightening prospect of effectual conversion.

The offending child, who hearkens to the admonitions of an injured parent; or, in retirement, considers the pernicious effects of his disobedience; and sensible, not only of the disgrace and misery to which he is exposed, but of the many advantages to be derived from an opposite conduct, endeavours to reason himself into a more submissive and affectionate

frame, does not yet possess the temper, nor perform the duties of filial piety. But does he not take a step which encourages the hope of his reformation, and gives pleasure to all who wish it? What parent would be dissatisfied with these auspicious beginnings? Rather let me ask, what parent would neglect to cherish and assist their progress? "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" With this divine argument before you, can you suspect that the God of all grace will spurn the returning prodigal from his presence, because he is destitute of that holiness which he implores and seeks? Can you doubt, a moment, whether he will behold him with an eye of compassion; and, "while he is yet a great way off," reach forth the helping hand to aid and accellerate his approach? If there be "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance," there must be a disposition in heaven to give energy and effect to measures preparatory to this exercise; and to adopt and pursue these measures must afford a rational and scriptural ground of trust in divine mercy.

For although it is never to be forgotten, that as in the natural, so in the moral system, all events are subject to the control and government of Jehovah ; and that we are alike indebted to his guardian care and blessing for spiritual and temporal endowments, it is still to be remembered that "he will yet for this be inquired of to do it for us." In this way, and in no other, he usually meets and accepts his degenerate offspring.

Whether, therefore, we consider their operation on the springs of human action, or their instrumentality to prepare the minds of men for the reception and improvement of the grace they need, the means of religion obviously lead to a happy result.

III. This result we are, thirdly, to disclose. When we look around on that part of chistendom, which falls within the compass of our observation, what description of persons are most frequently renewed in the spirit of their minds? Are they the heedless triflers, who seldom spend a thought on the solemn realities of eternity ; who deem it a burden even to hear, much more to read and contemplate moral and religious instruction? No ; they are the sober and regular attendants on *the* sacred institutions of the gospel ; who

"ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward; watching daily at wisdom's gates, and waiting at the posts of her doors."

That men are usually converted from sin to holiness, in this manner, none, I think, will dispute. Some, however, may allege, as exceptions to the general rule, that of those who are equally sedulous in the use of means, "one is taken and another left;" and that there are cases in which all these "are passed by," whilst some notorious offender is suddenly arrested in his mad career, and "brought out of darkness, into marvellous light." But for ought we can tell, the person who wears the aspect of equal solicitude and zeal, may be a mere formalist, confiding in externals for salvation; or an artful hypocrite, employing them for no better purpose than to gain the confidence and applause of mortals. Whilst the similar conduct of the other may originate in a sincere desire to be "delivered from the corruption that is in the world through lust, and made partaker of a divine nature." Or perhaps both may be real christians, and the contrast between them consist solely in their different degrees of assurance. So too, the person, who unexpectedly assumes the air and language of religion, may, after all, be an en-

thusiastick pretender, transported by the fervour of animal affections, which will soon subside, and present him again to our view in his former character. Examples of this sort often occur. Admit, nevertheless, that he stands the test, and "brings forth fruits meet for repentance;" is no account to be given of such a change without supposing it miraculous? If an indolent man roused by the suffering and want, which he had brought upon himself, were instantly to alter his course, and, by economy and exertion, to rival, or even to surpass his more industrious and opulent neighbours, should we once think of ascribing this alteration to a supernatural interposition of providence in his behalf? Is it less probable that the abandoned sinner, when truly awakened, may so sensibly feel the guilt and misery of his state, as to be impelled to efforts, which, in concurrence with the established influences of the holy spirit, may greatly accelerate his conversion? Do we not know by experience, that the length or shortness of the time in which all our attainments are made, depends much, under God, on the ardour with which they are sought. And are we not conscious, that this ardour is always proportionate to the sense we have of their necessity and worth?

Hence, notwithstanding any appearances to the contrary, the cooperation of heaven may invariably correspond to the respective diligence, of individuals, in quest of "the one thing needful:" Not as a reward of debt, but of grace, free and unmerited grace; that grace which, according to their different degrees of fidelity and zeal, will assign a more or less brilliant crown to those who are finally found of their judge in peace.

In worldly pursuits we are expressly apprized, that "the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill." But in spiritual concerns, "of a truth God is no respecter of persons. Thus saith the Lord, I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain." The grounds of this difference are obvious. Temporal disappointments may be needful and conducive to transfer our affections from earth to heaven; and in this light, though not "joyous, but grievous for the present," may be inflicted in mercy. Yet what reason, comporting with the benevolence and equity of the divine character, can be assigned for rejecting the suit of any who aspires to a "clean heart and a right spirit?" Other bles-

sings may be withheld from a kind regard to our ultimate and more durable happiness; but this is a privation, yea the only privation which transforms existence itself into the greatest of evils, and renders it "better not to have been born." On this point, therefore, the scriptures are full and explicit. "Draw nigh to God, and he shall draw nigh to you." For as I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die? Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

These and other declarations of the same import, are constantly verified in fact. Every one, who has made the experiment can testify, that in proportion to the vigilance and activity with which he has sought to understand and perform his duty, he has been enabled to resist temptation, and go from strength to strength in the practice of religion and virtue.

Were it, however, conceded, that for special reasons, God sometimes reclaims men in

different way, the concession would not warrant us to conclude; that means are useless or unsuccessful. A few in every age are permitted to inherit estates, for which they never laboured: shall we therefore deny that "the diligent hand maketh rich?" Ask your hearts, or let your daily practice decide. It is still more certain, "if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure, that then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."

In reviewing this subject, we are led,

1. To remark the wisdom and goodness of God in appointing a method for the recovery of apostate man, which is visibly adapted to his condition and capacities, and perfectly analogous to what reason dictates, and experience sanctions in all other cases. Every argument that proves the necessity of vigilance and activity for the advancement of our temporal interests, demonstrates the utility of means in quest of religious improvement; and every objection which can be brought against the one, lies with equal weight against the other. Is it alleged that faith is the gift of God? So are all the outward mercies which we seek and enjoy. "Both riches and honour come of him. It *is he that giveth power* to get wealth." Is it

alleged, that nothing that we can perform will render us disciples of Christ, unless the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the holy spirit be afforded us? Neither will the utmost care and toil, of which we are capable, defend us from the casualties, or insure to us the conveniences of this life, if divine co-operation be withheld. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Is it alleged, that to believe our exertions needful and salutary militates with the doctrine of free grace, and betrays into self confidence? This goes to prove it criminal to practise industry in pursuit of temporal prosperity. For God is the beneficent author of all our blessings; and it is not less evidently a crime to refuse him the honour due to his name, on account of his providential goodness, than to withhold that which results from his redeeming love. Are we then to indulge a supine inattention to all our wants, and, without once essaying to procure a supply, to expect miraculous relief from heaven? "It is written thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Equally absurd and ungrateful is the plea *of inability*. For, "suppose the worst; that

we are utterly destitute of any supernatural principle, and want that taste by which we should discern and abhor perverse things: yet surely we are capable of some considerations which may be of force to persuade us to the reformation of our lives. If the inward deformity and hateful nature of sin cannot effect us, at least we may be affrighted by the dreadful consequences that attend it. That same selfish principle, which pushes us forward to the pursuit of sinful pleasures, will make us loth to procure them at the rate of everlasting misery. Thus we may encounter self love with its own weapons, and employ one natural inclination for repressing the exorbitances of another."*

The degree of human depravity is a question, which, however decided, cannot materially affect religious means. Its full extent is certainly known to an omniscient God. The regimen which he has prescribed must, therefore, be practicable in itself, and adapted to the nature of the disease. Can we conceive that he has ordained means, of which it is impossible for us to avail ourselves with effect; and yet holds us responsible and guilty for their

* Scougal's Life of God in the Soul of Man, p. 69, 70. Phila. Edit.

failure? The scriptures represent him, as giving talents "to every one according to his several ability," and invariably requiring "according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Having sent his son "to seek and save that which was lost," he accommodates his dealings and demands to our fallen state; and encourages, succeeds, and accepts such feeble efforts for deliverance as our perverted faculties will admit. Without these efforts, we have no just ground of hope. As well might we presume on a plentiful harvest, independent of all care to deposit seed and cherish its growth. If we "hide our talents in the earth," can we expect a miracle to be the recompense of our sloth? Or will it avail us to plead, that we believed the law giver and Judge of creation "an austere and hard master, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strowed"? Let us not harbour a sentiment so derogatory to the adorable majesty of the universe; but convinced as well of his willingness and power to serve as of the absolute necessity of pardon and sanctification, let us surmount every doubt and discouragement; and impotent as we are, "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;

for it is God that worketh within us to will and to do of his good pleasure."

2. We infer that the use of religious means is no less innocent and safe, than obligatory. They tend, as we have seen, to call our minds from vanity and vice, and to prepare us for the reception of divine light and aid. Now in all other cases, we scruple not to adopt and pursue the measures which are evidently conducive to useful achievements. Their natural connexion with the end proposed, is justly considered a clear intimation of heaven, that they are lawful and right. Can it then be an aggravation of the sinner's guilt, to take the only steps, which offer him the prospect of divine forgiveness and favour? To say that he does not take these steps in the exercise of love and devotion to his maker, is but saying, in other words, that he is yet destitute of what he is commanded to seek, which, far from a valid objection, is precisely the reason, which binds him to strive for its attainment. However opposed to the authority and will of God, would he commit an additional crime by inquiring into the grounds of this opposition; by investigating the doctrines and precepts of christianity; by receiving the word *with all readiness* of mind;" and by "search-

ing the scriptures daily whether these things were so?" For this conduct the ancient Bereans are commended by the sacred historian, as "more noble than those in Thessalonica:" and who does not feel the justice of the commendation? As rational and accountable agents, what else could they have done with equal innocence and advantage? In what other way could they have contributed so effectually to their conversion? The consequence of their attention to means is a sufficient answer to inquiries. "Therefore," as we read in the words immediately following, "therefore many of them believed."*

3. The intrinsick excellence and importance of religion suggest the strongest motives to "go and do likewise. If," said our blessed Lord to the woman of Samaria, "if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living waters." Could we persuade mankind to realize, "that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;" could we place in a true light the "joy and peace of believing;" could we communicate proper

* Acts xvii. 12.

sentiments of the support and happiness to be derived from the testimony of an approving conscience, and the anticipation of future glory, none surely would be indifferent to that good part which can never be taken away. All would importunately demand, "what shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Direct your thoughts then to this interesting subject. Contemplate the inestimable privilege of a restoration to the image and complacency of him, whose "favour is life and, whose loving kindness is better than life." Call to mind that the "world passes away, and the lust thereof, whilst he that doth the will of God abideth forever." Antedate the approaching hour, when you shall stand on the verge of the eternal state; and when the inscription of vanity on every thing below the sun must be read and felt. Convinced that then, at least, it will be the prayer of your heart, "let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his, seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near."

This leads, 4. To remind you of the ample encouragement and assurance of success, with which you are furnished. "God hath a

tender regard to the souls of men, and is infinitely desirous to promote their welfare. He hath condescended to our weakness, and declared with an oath, that he hath no pleasure in our destruction. There is no such thing as despite or envy lodged in the bosom of that ever blessed being, whose name and nature is love. He created us at first, in a happy condition; and now, when we have fallen from it, he hath laid help upon one that is mighty to save. Did not the son of God come down from the bosom of his father, and pitch his tabernacle among the sons of men, that he might recover and propagate the divine life, and restore the image of God in their souls? All the mighty works which he performed; all the sad afflictions which he sustained had this for their scope and design. For this did he labour and toil; for this did he bleed and die."* For this too, did he burst the bars of the grave, "ascend on high, lead captivity captive, and receive gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Fear not, therefore; for they that be with us are more than they that be against us." Suffer no obstacle, however formidable in human appearance, to dishearten

* Scougal, ut supra, p. 57, 8.

you. "Every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." A useful lesson may be learnt from the patience and resolution, with which the perishable possessions of time are pursued. For these, multitudes "rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness." No expedient is left untried, which offers aid to the favourite purpose. Is it not unspeakably more important and reasonable to be unwearied in prosecution of that "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away?" Content not yourselves, then, with a languid or partial application to the necessary means. Not only hear, but read the lively oracles of God: not only unite in the devotions of the sanctuary, but perform those also of the family and closet: not only consecrate the holy sabbath to religious meditations and exercises, but habitually guard your hearts, your lips, and your lives: For "then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord."

The spirit of the gospel is to be cultivated and improved by the same means, which are prescribed for its production: and "it is with the christian as with the man in trade; the more *he acquires*, the more he is enabled to

gain; every increase is not only a possession but a capacity." Under this impression "whereto we have attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing." Far from confiding in any progress already made, let us go on to perfection, and "forgetting the things that are behind, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

"Wait on the Lord; be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

SERMON II.

ON RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATION.

PSALM CXIX. 59, 60.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

THE sacred oracles abound, as well with examples, as instructions, suited to all conditions and characters of men. Not only the distinguished piety and virtue of ancient worthies, but the means by which they were first inspired to a just sense of their duty and destination, and "turned to the wisdom of the just," are recorded "for our learning:" The former to guide and animate the saint in a resolute adherence to the way of truth; the latter to admonish the sinner of what "the Lord his God requireth of him, and encourage his efforts for deliverance from the dominion and punishment of iniquity.

be no less practicable than prudent to "foresee the evil and hide ourselves." Before we engage in any pursuit of moment, we accordingly attend to its various aspects and relations; and endeavour to ascertain its probable influence on our leading interests: Whether it be calculated to promote the happiness we desire, or to involve us in the misery we dread? Whether the advantages it offers be sufficient to counterbalance the inconveniences it may occasion? Not content with this previous examination, we often pause and review our conduct; compare its present effects with our former anticipations, and seek to discover its final result.

Now this disposition and practice, transferred from temporal to spiritual concerns, constitutes the important duty in discussion. Nor are any additional faculties necessary to its faithful performance. Endowed with reason, and admonished by every object which meets our eyes, and every enjoyment which gladdens our hearts, it is impossible for us to doubt the being, perfections, and government of God; or be unapprized of our consequent obligations to know and do his will. Born and educated in a land of gospel light; and acquainted from "our childhood with the holy scriptures,

which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." However forgetful, we cannot be ignorant of the doctrines and laws of the new covenant, nor destitute of motives, "by patient continuance in well doing, to seek for glory and honour and immortality." The most heedless and [illegible] have general impressions of the excellency and utility of religion. In many cases these impressions so [illegible] their character and prospects, and the necessity of a [illegible] terms of reconciliation [illegible] the importunity of [illegible] the suggestions [illegible] spirit of God [illegible] state and temper [illegible] to bring their [illegible] of divine truth.

Behold [illegible] able example [illegible] measure [illegible] and misery, [illegible] from the [illegible] comfort, [illegible] favour of his [illegible] view of the [illegible] satisfactory of his being; [illegible] his intercourse [illegible]

be no less practicable than prudent to "foresee the evil and hide ourselves." Before we engage in any pursuit of moment, we accordingly attend to its various aspects and relations; and endeavour to ascertain its probable influence on our leading interests: Whether it be calculated to promote the happiness we desire, or to involve us in the misery we dread? Whether the advantages it offers be sufficient to counterbalance the inconveniences it may occasion? Not content with this previous examination, we often pause and review our conduct; compare its present effects with our former anticipations, and seek to discover its final result.

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which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus," however forgetful, we cannot be ignorant of the doctrines and laws of the new covenant, nor destitute of motives, " by patient continuance in well doing, to seek for glory, and honour, and immortality." The most heedless and secure have general impressions of the excellence and utility of religion. In many cases, these impressions so forcibly urge an investigation of their character and prospects, and inculcate the necessity of a seasonable compliance with the terms of reconciliation, that unless they resist the importunity of their own minds, as well as the suggestions of the word, providence, and spirit of God, they are led to look into the state and temper of their hearts with care, and to bring their life and conversation to the test of divine truth.

Behold then the man who imitates the laudable example of the psalmist, and adopts a measure favourable to his recovery from guilt and misery, to virtue and glory. Roused from the visionary dream of lasting peace and comfort, independent of the approbation and favour of his God, he takes a comprehensive view of the nature, circumstances, and relations of his being; and diligently inquires satisfaction

end he was born, and for what purpose he came into the world ? He contemplates the heavens and the earth with increased attention, and is penetrated with a sense of the wisdom, power, and benevolence of their glorious author, which he has not been accustomed to feel. He turns his thoughts within ; and, in the curious structure of his body, and the wonderful properties of his soul, recognizes incontestible evidence of his derivation from an infinite intelligence, to whom he is indebted for existence and all its blessings. He recounts the numerous tokens of parental kindness, which he has received from his heavenly father, in the distinguished rank allotted him among the creatures of God ; in the abundant provision made for his subsistence and accommodation ; and in the still more illustrious manifestations of grace and truth for his eternal redemption by Jesus Christ. Convinced by these beneficent arrangements and signal interpositions, that man is formed for more exalted dignity and durable enjoyment than earth can boast, it becomes a question of the first magnitude, whether he have not pursued the shadow to the neglect of the substance, and relied for [illegible]ess on possessions and gratifications inca- a land of [illegible]ing it? He therefore, thinks on his " our childr[illegible]

ways ;" considers with himself, what fruit he has already had, and what he is yet to expect from the course he has taken. Past experience thus called to testify bears witness, that no sensual indulgence, or worldly acquisition has afforded the bliss it promised ; that forbidden pleasures are always empty in participation and disgusting in review ; and that the gains of ungodliness are invariably attended with remorse and foreboding fear. The more he reflects, the more sensibly does he feel, that nothing below the sun is adequate to the desires and capacities of an immortal mind ; and the more clearly does he see, that " the wages of sin is death ;" that beside the pain and sufferings, which it inflicts in this life, and which not unfrequently hasten the hour of dissolution, it entails the most insupportable evils on its deluded votaries beyond the grave.

Under these apprehensions he directs his meditations to the long neglected subject of religion ; and discovers, contrary to all his preconceived notions, that the gospel forbids nothing but what is undeniably injurious to himself, or others ; and requires no sacrifice which is not visibly adapted to promote his personal tranquillity, and diffuse joy and satisfaction through the *whole circle* of his intercourse and

connexions. That gloom and melancholy which he had erroneously associated with the offices of piety and devotion, vanish on a nearer inspection, and these offices appear in their native dignity and loveliness; as reasonable, and, to the unsophisticated mind, delightful expressions of affection for the character, and trust in the mercy of a wise and bounteous creator. When he ponders the obligations which he owes to his fellow men, instead of militating, as he had hitherto imagined, with the advancement of his worldly prosperity and ease, to be just, charitable and generous is found the most effectual means of securing the friendship, esteem, and patronage of all around him. Even the duties of self denial, in the government of his inordinate lusts and passions, which he once believed totally inconsistent with the enjoyment of life, are seen to be eminently conducive to this purpose. He now remembers, and is surprized at his former blindness to the fact, that whenever he has abstained from excess, and approached nearest to the christian moderation and obedience, he has been most free from inquietude and vexation of spirit.

In addition to the numberless blessings, *which flow* from the practice of holiness and

virtue in this pilgrimage state, he traces its inseparable connexion with a future and eternal recompense of reward; and realizes that "all the promises of God in Jesus Christ are yea, and amen." Thus convinced, "that the way of transgressors is hard," and that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," he renounces the absurd, yet prevalent delusion, that the divine commands are grievous; and admits the fitness, as well as the advantage of allegiance to the lawgiver and judge of creation. Not the danger only, but the vile ingratitude of loving and serving the creature more than the creator, rise to his view, in all their deformity. At the same time the visible and humiliating contrast between his past deportment, and the righteous injunctions of inspiration, effectually convinces him that he has deviated widely from the way of peace; and not only exposed himself to misery; but with inexcusable perverseness and insensibility, forgotten the God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. He, therefore, deeply regrets his former course; and whilst with unfeigned contrition he confesses and bewails his guilt; and in the name of him

who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, implores divine forgiveness and aid, he resolves to "break off his sins by righteousness and his iniquities by turning unto the Lord."

Such, in brief, is the duty of religious consideration.

II. We proposed, secondly, to remark its salutary effects, in a cheerful and prompt submission to the will of God. Inherent in our nature is a principle, which impels us studiously to shun whatever we conceive to be hurtful, and ardently to desire and seek its opposite. The wicked are no less solicitous for happiness, than the righteous. Their most criminal pursuits, though egregiously misdirected, are designed and expected by them to issue in this favourite atchievement: And the eagerness, address, and perseverance of their exertions, at once display the power of the motive, by which they are governed, and prove them capable of astonishing vigilance, resolution and self denial, in quest of any thing which they believe conducive to their interest, reputation, or enjoyment. All mankind, however mistaken in their object, uniformly aspire to what they apprehend the greatest good, and labour to be delivered from that which gives *them uneasiness* and pain. Actuated by this

universal impulse, we often abandon undertakings, in which we have incautiously engaged, and commence a new and different career; and we daily witness in others, changes of character and conduct, which evidently originate in the same cause.

Serious consideration enlists this natural principle into the service of religion, and makes it a potent auxiliary and incentive to christian obedience. The worldling infatuated by the delusive opinion, that the perishable possessions and pleasures of time constitute the most desirable portion of mortals, is precipitated into the chase of vanity: But when he duly considers that instability is inscribed on all sublunary things; and that the only permanent bliss results, from "a conscience void of offence," will he not be constrained to renounce his errour, and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?" The profligate, hackneyed in the ways of iniquity, and surrounded by dissolute companions, blushes at the imputation of virtue, "makes a mock at sin," and even "glories in his shame." But what are his feelings, when, in the hour of retirement and reflection, conscience sounds that awful alarm, "know thou that for all these things *God shall bring* thee into judgment?"

Can he soberly contemplate his true character, and yet, callous to the disingenuity of his life, neither dread, nor fly that "everlasting contempt," to which he is exposed? The votary of false honour too, who, at every hazard, repels the least affront from a fellow worm; what must be his emotions, when he sees, in their intrinsick deformity, the numberless indignities which he has habitually offered to the God "in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being?" Can he still remain indifferent and averse to the reasonable obligations, under which he is laid? Can he still refuse to make a single effort to "turn from his evil ways?"

Indeed, what vice can be named, which, if beheld in its real nature and consequences, would not be abhorred and forsaken by its fondest admirers? Is it intemperance? Did the drunkard ponder, as he ought, the disgrace and wretchedness, which he entails on himself, his family, and his connexions; did he recollect the awakening denunciations of heaven against riot and excess, he would literally "cut off his right hand and cast it from him," sooner than reach it forth to grasp the intoxicating cup! Is it profaneness? Were the blasphemous swearer to realize that, beside the pain and horrour with *which every* sober mind is filled by his impre-

cations, "the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," he would no longer persist in a transgression, for which the most fruitful imagination can neither invent an excuse, nor conceive a temptation! Is it sensuality? Were the libertine brought to a proper conviction of the debasing influence of his crimes in this world, and their deplorable termination in the next; "that they who live in pleasure are dead while they live; and that "whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," he would surely "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Is it ambition? Let the trappings of earthly pomp and splendour be estimated according to their inherent worth; let the breath of popular applause be weighed in a righteous balance, and contrasted with the approbation of him, whose "favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life;" and none would be found to "love the praise of men, more than the praise of God." Is it covetousness? After bringing home to his bosom that impressive expostulation, "what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" who would make gold his trust, or seek its accumulation to the detriment of his neighbour?

But not to multiply particulars, let it suffice to say in general, that when the sinner, of whatever description, clearly sees the errour of his ways, and has a just sense of his numerous and aggravated deviations from duty and happiness, the strongest motives urge and facilitate his reformation. It is not to be dissembled however, that the force of custom, combined with surrounding enticements may greatly retard his progress and prolong his conflict. He will find it indispensably necessary to watch the motions and counteract the wiles of his spiritual enemies: Nor can he expect to gain the conquest but by resolute and persevering struggles. In proportion to the length of time, in which they have been masters of the field, and the degree of vassalage to which he is reduced, will be the difficulty of dislodging them. They will not resign their empire without resistance. Though they retreat they will return again to the charge; and unless repelled with renewed and unabating firmness, will re-establish their tyrannical dominion. Every avenue to his heart must be guarded with the utmost care; the points of weakness, by which he is most exposed to assault or surprize must be ascertained; all the means of defence, with which he is furnished must be employed with

assiduous industry ; and the armour of God must be sought to aid the contest and insure the victory.

It is not a transient consideration, or superficial impression, either of the " exceeding sinfulness of sin," or of the celestial beauty of holiness, which impels us to " flee for refuge and lay hold on the hope set before us."

This consideration must be habitual, and this impression must be profound. Transgressors, who " remember this ; show themselves men ; and bring it again to mind," aided by that grace which is sufficient for them, and supported by that strength, which is made perfect in weakness, will persevere in their endeavours ; turn their feet unto the testimonies of the Lord ; and make haste and delay not to keep his commandments."

In this state of mind, such are their views of the character and government of God ; of the mildness and benevolence of all his exactions ; and of the vile ingratitude, as well as unspeakable danger of " living without him in the world," that they dread above all things, a relapse into their former insensibility ; and " take the most earnest heed lest they should again be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Far from contenting themselves with the vague

resolution of future obedience, it is their first concern to " prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." Their vigilance and activity, instead of relaxing, increase with this progress; and, " forgetting the things that are behind, they press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Aware that they are still in the body, and encompassed by snares; that their warfare is not yet accomplished, nor their triumph complete, they " watch and pray that they enter not into temptation; and walking circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;" their " path like the shining light, shineth more and more until the perfect day." This was exemplified in the conversion of David: and thousands, since David's time, have been turned from darkness to light, by the same process.

In applying this subject, we are led,

1. To reflect on the mischiefs of inconsideration. This is the prolifick parent of no inconsiderable part of that indifference and aversion to religion which prevails in the world. To the best of men, much more to the dissolute and vicious, the purity and extent of the divine law exhibit a humiliating contrast to their own imperfections and faults. Apprehensive of this, multitudes shrink from the comparison;

and although they would shudder at the thought of rejecting the gospel, and appearing under the banners of infidelity, they "come not to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." Avoiding all self application of the scriptures, they satisfy themselves with such general and indefinite conceptions of their contents, as neither disturb their repose, nor impel them to amendment. In this heedless frame it is easy to foresee, that their inordinate affections and lusts will gain irresistible strength, and "lead them captive of the deceiver at his will." Without feeling that remorse and fear, which, for a time at least, are the inseparable attendants of open apostacy from the faith, they are insensibly decoyed into many, if not all the excesses of absolute unbelief. Exposed, without defence, to every temptation, in countless instances they transgress, without "considering that they do evil." Conscience uninformed of their criminality, sounds not the alarm; and "they bless themselves and say, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imagination of our hearts."

"Nothing," says a late elegant writer,* "nothing can be more wavering and disjoint-

* Doctor Blair.

ed, than the behaviour of those, who have never been accustomed to commune with themselves. Dissipation is a more frequent cause of their ruin, than determined impiety. It is not so much because they have adopted bad principles, as because they have never attended to principles of any kind, that their lives are so full of incoherence and disorder." Let it not, however, be supposed, that no atrocious guilt is attached to this heedless course, or that the ignorance and insensibility which mark its progress, can furnish an apology for vice and irreligion. God has endowed us with reason, and by his word, providence, and grace, perpetually invites and urges its exercise: nor can any solid plea be made in excuse for its neglect, or perversion. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider!"

2. We infer the duty, necessity and advantage of religious consideration. Were you admonished by a friend, of whose sagacity and affection you could have no doubt, that the manner of life in which you had engaged,

was detrimental to your interest, and must ultimately involve you in embarrassment and suffering; would you not pay so much regard to the kind admonition, as to re-examine your arrangements, and endeavour to ascertain whether you had reason to apprehend the predicted evil? The bare possibility that you might have adopted measures hostile to your own happiness, would induce you to take this necessary precaution to foresee and avert the impending disaster. "Now God, who knows the end from the beginning," and who has "commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," has assured us, that to continue in a state of alienation from him, is to walk in "the way that leadeth to destruction;" that unless we embrace and obey the gospel of his Son, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" must be our final portion. Coincident with the declarations of his word, his various allotments, in the government of human affairs, are calculated to engage our attention to the "things which belong to our peace." Mercies and afflictions proceed from the same source, and originate in the same motive. Both are benevolently designed, and both natu-

rally tend to direct our thoughts and desires to God. Take but a superficial survey of your past life, and you will perceive the truth of this remark. You will recollect repeated instances, in which the conduct of heaven has impressed your mind with a deep sense of your moral obligations. At the solemn period, when threatened with the loss of an affectionate friend, a beloved relative, a bosom companion, a darling child; or, when in dangerous sickness, there seemed "but a step between you and death," you felt your dependance and your peril; and in the anguish of your soul, poured forth your supplications for deliverance, and with your supplications, your vows of future allegiance to the king of kings. Deliverance was granted to the extent of your wishes, and far beyond your fears. What, then, are the returns which you ought to make? Can it be innocent to suffer your devout impressions and resolutions to vanish with the calamity which produced them; to lose even the remembrance of your divine benefactor, and plunge again into the vanities of time and sense? If you thus requite the Lord for all his benefits; if you prove thus disobedient to his "heavenly warnings," and faithless to your own engagements, can you hope for the

continuance of his protection in this world, or the enjoyment of his presence in the next? Are you not rather exposed to that awful repulse, "because I have called, and you have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and you have not regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." "Sit down, therefore, and count the cost." Contemplate the nature and circumstances of your being. Look back to the hour of retirement and distress, and recall the sentiments both of time and eternity which you then entertained. These sentiments, however indifferent or averse to them in the day of prosperity, will return with adversity. Nor will they return alone. They will be attended with painful reproaches of conscience, and fearful apprehensions of divine displeasure for past neglects. Be wise now to "understand this, and consider your latter end." Dismiss not the awakening meditation, but yield to its salutary influence; live "as seeing him that is invisible;" and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

This, as we are taught 3. is the proper test of the duty now recommended. We may occasionally employ our thoughts on the interest-

ing realities of another life; we may acquaint ourselves with the theory of christianity, and become zealous advocates for certain tenets; we may withstand every differing opinion, and contend earnestly for the peculiarities of a favourite creed; our passions and affections may be often moved; and we may be ready, not only to dispute but to converse on the logical topicks, whilst as yet we are strangers to "the plague of our own hearts." The important inquiry is, not how we speculate, but how we practise? That consideration on our ways, which the Lord of hosts requires, is inseparably connected with a cheerful and unreserved obedience to his commands. Nothing, which admits delay or exception, is worthy of the name: It is mere hypocrisy and pretence. Have we then inspected the inmost recesses of our souls, and assiduously sought to "understand our errours;" to discover and irradicate our most "secret faults" and darling lusts? With our personal exertions, have we combined the spirit of that fervent prayer, "search us, O God, and know our hearts; try us, and know our thoughts: See if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting?" *Do the* apprehensions, which we habit-

ually cherish, of the intrinsick turpitude of all sin, render us solicitous, in preference of every other achievement, to "glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his?" Convinced, that to defer the work, which is given us to do, would betray a thankless insensibility to the greatest and best of beings, and lead to incurable habits of impiety and vice, do we take the divine testimonies for our daily counsellors, and, in all our enterprizes and pursuits, make them "a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path?"

"Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord."

SERMON III.

ON PRAYER.

JOB xxi. 15.

What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

"MUCH every way;" for all the exercises of mind and habits of life, which the divine law imposes, are obviously adapted to our advantage; obviously conducive and necessary to our improvement and happiness. Than this truth, few positions can be named, which are more intelligible and evident to all capacities. "If we be righteous, what do we give unto God, or what receiveth he at our hands?" For our sake, most assuredly, has he condescended to give us existence, to take on himself the direction of our affairs, and to prescribe rules for the government of our hearts and manners. The possibility of every other motive is excluded. Yet strange to

ell ! not a single duty can be described and nforced, but one or another exerts all his ingenuity to invent excuses for its neglect ; nd raise objections either against its fitness, r utility, or both.

Such, though nothing can be more reasonble in itself considered, or more salutary in ts operations and effects on the human character, is peculiarly the case with prayer. Urge he many arguments, which evince its importance, and, beside the more trite and insignificant pleas, which carry their own refutation with them, you will be told, that viewing God, as omniscient, unchangeable, infinitely wise and good, there can be little or no foundation for any thing of the kind. If he be omniscient, so they argue, he must know all our wants, without any enumeration of them on our part : If he be unchangeable, no importunities, of which we are capable, will induce him to alter his purpose : If he be infinitely wise, he is certainly the best judge respecting the time and manner of bestowing favour ; and if he be infinitely good, he will, of course, be disposed to administer seasonable relief to his necessitous, dependent creatures. Where then is the propriety of formal

addresses to the Almighty? "And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"

Persons, who can thus deliberately oppose the clearest dictates of reason and scripture, are, perhaps, beyond the hope of amendment; and to attempt it might be labour lost. This, however, is not the case with the generality of mankind. Multitudes are rather perplexed, than convinced, by these impious sophists. To them, at least, an essential service may be rendered, by placing the subject in a rational and just point of light.

I propose therefore, first, to make some brief observations, tending to obviate the preceding objections, and illustrate the nature and obligation of prayer: Secondly, to give a summary view of its various advantages: and then, thirdly, to conclude the whole by enforcing its uniform and devout practice, in all its branches.

I. "Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." It is intended, not to inform him of our necessities; not to persuade him to reverse his determinations; not to dictate the mode, or the period of his interpositions in

our behalf; nor yet to inspire him with sentiments of benevolence and compassion, to which he is now a stranger. It operates on ourselves, and is manifestly adapted to meliorate our disposition and behaviour; to preserve in our bosoms a lively sense of our dependent and guilty state; to excite and increase our "trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength," and "with whom is forgiveness and plenteous redemption;" to call forth our activity and zeal in his service; to render us patient, submissive, and contented under his allotments; and thus to qualify us for the reception and improvement of his mercy.

Such being the end of prayer to God, that he is omniscient; that "he knows what things we have need of, before we ask him;" that he is perfectly acquainted with the inmost recesses of our souls, and always discerns the sincerity with which we call on his name, far from proving an impediment, ought in justice to become a powerful incentive to the practice. To the mind impressed with a due conviction of its own weakness, and consequent need of divine aid and support, how consolatory the idea of approaching an all-sufficient helper, who sees and commiserates our

infirmities, and will not despise the humble aspirations of the broken heart! Were we reduced to the necessity of soliciting assistance from man, should we not do it with increased alacrity and boldness, if assured, that neither our circumstances, nor our intentions would be misapprehended? Since, then, we are fully apprized, that no mistake of this sort can be incident to our heavenly father; since all that is requisite to his acceptance and benediction is integrity of heart; and since to inspire this is the tendency and aim of prayer, how many and how conclusive are the reasons, which hence result for its constant exercise?

The same conclusion flows, with equal strength of evidence, from the immutability of God. He has declared the righteous to be objects of his favour; the wicked of his displeasure; and never will he "alter the thing which has gone out of his lips." If, therefore, we would enjoy his approbation and blessing, instead of expecting him to recede from his word, and "deny himself," a change must be produced in us. We must imbibe the spirit and display the purity of his children. To accomplish a purpose, at once, so desirable and necessary, nothing can be more conducive than frequent prayer. This serves to

remove from us the iniquities, which "separate between us and our God," and to generate and cherish those devout affections and virtuous habits, which are always pleasing and acceptable in his sight. This, therefore, is a proper and indispensable mean of acquiring and improving that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

The importance of prayer is no less demonstratively proved from the divine wisdom and goodness. These, in conjunction, whilst they insure the faithful from every destructive ill, invite the whole race of Adam, in persuasive accents, to "taste and see that God is gracious." Can a stronger motive to habitual prayer and praise be conceived, than the animating truth, that the beneficent parent of angels and men, not only sees what is best for us, but encourages us to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need?" It is true, indeed, that by the benignity of his nature, independent of our wishes, he is inclined to do us good; and will perform what is fit and proper, though we should not request it. We are nevertheless to remember, that it can be neither fit, nor proper, that he

should lavish his favours upon those who "cast off fear and restrain prayer." Fitness and propriety are, in this case, determined by the disposition of the persons who need his protection and bounty: And if they refuse to acknowledge their dependence, and implore his smiles, their perverseness naturally subjects them to his frowns. Like objects secluded from the rays of the sun, not because he ceases to shine in every direction, but because some gross impenetrable substance intervenes, the emanations of divine goodness, which would otherwise spontaneously shed their salutary influence upon them, are obstructed by their sins. The temper of prayer is an essential qualification for the blessing of God; especially for the renewing and sanctifying influences of his spirit. For this reason, not to excite or increase his willingness to save, "he will be inquired of to do it for us." Hence it appears, notwithstanding the various cavils, which ignorance and vice have framed, that all the attributes of heaven combine to support and enforce the duty, for which we contend. At the same time, the nature and circumstances of our being obviously require its habitual and fervent performance. What clearer dictate of reason can be

imagined, than that creatures, endowed with understanding, and capable of the knowledge, service, and enjoyment of a holy God; creatures dependent on him for life, and all its comforts; creatures weakened by infirmity and endangered by temptation; creatures polluted by sin and exposed to punishment, should daily prostrate themselves at his footstool, gratefully recognize his forbearance, and humbly raise their desires to him for pardon, defence, and salvation?

Add to these considerations the many passages of scripture, in which prayer is expressly commanded, with the various promises and examples of its efficacy, recorded for your encouragement; and every shadow of doubt will vanish from your minds. In theory, at least, you will concede, that far from an irksome, superstitious, or useless task, to "commit your way to the Lord," and "fill your mouths with arguments" before him, is not only an incumbent and reasonable act of devotion, but an exalted and delightful privilege.

When we contemplate the frailty, imperfection, and guilt, to which we are reduced; when we recount the variety of sufferings, which threaten our repose; and when we realize the infinite distance, at which we are

placed from the dread sovereign of the universe, how signal, how undeserved the condescension and grace, which invite us to "come even to his seat!" How cheering the thought, that on all occasions "we have access to the father, through Jesus Christ," the son of his love; may repair to him for consolation and relief; unbosom ourselves in his presence without reserve; and, with a filial confidence, spread our wants, our sorrows, and our fears before him!

II. Do you require additional inducements to a practice, thus visibly adapted to your condition and friendly to your comfort? Take then, as proposed secondly, a summary view of its advantages in the following particulars.

1. To pray for ourselves manifestly tends both to prevent transgression, and facilitate obedience.

The person, who begins and closes every day of his life with a solemn approach to the father and friend of creation, can hardly be destitute of motives, either to withstand the enticements of iniquity, or to persevere in "well doing." His responsibility to "the judge of all the earth" is by this mean engraved on his mind. He is led habitually to feel his own insufficiency, and excited to "stay

himself on the rock of ages." Accordingly, when he is tempted to evil, the idea of omniscient purity, accompanied with numerous and conclusive arguments for resistance, naturally occurs to his thoughts. He adverts to the penitential confessions and ardent supplications, which he has recently made in the presence of his maker, and which he expects soon to repeat. He sees the ingratitude and presumption of rebelling against so powerful, so wise, so holy, and so good a being. He is convinced that remorse and foreboding fear must attend his future addresses at the throne of grace, should he wilfully transgress the divine command. Taught by past experience, that guilt alienates the affections from every moral excellence, and produces aversion to communion and intercourse with heaven, he apprehends the danger of finally losing the disposition, as well as the confidence and benefit of prayer. He therefore repels the intruding temptation; and with all the ardour of virtuous resolution, exclaims, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Thus shielded from the wiles of the deceiver and his emissaries, he progresses continually in the great work, which is given him to do;

overcomes one spiritual enemy after another; and "goes from strength to strength," till he arrives to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

2. To pray for our connexions and friends, serves to purify domestick and social attachments; and to inspire principles and views, which exalt the ordinary interchange of civility and kindness into religious obedience.

This is a most effectual method of inducing christian forbearance, condescension, and charity, in the treatment of those, with whom we are destined to live and converse. Without it, though we prescribe rules to ourselves, and say to the selfish and angry passions, "hitherto shall ye come, but no further," we may notwithstanding, be transported beyond the bounds of moderation, and involved in the crimes and miseries of unreasonable animosity: With it, religion is made the umpire of our conduct, and the question comes home to our bosoms; how can we be unjust or censorious to those, whom we are accustomed to commend to the guardian care and grace of God? The many petitions, in which we have plead for mercy in their behalf, will react upon our own hearts, and, calling into exercise our benevolent sensibilities, furnish

the strongest incentives to that affectionate and conciliating deportment, which, beside its conformity to the gospel of Christ, and the attendant prospect of a future reward, is adapted to engage the confidence and esteem of all within the sphere of its influence. Than this practice, what can more effectually ensure a uniform and faithful discharge of the various duties, which result from the conjugal, parental, filial, fraternal, and other intimate relations of human life. It sanctifies, cements, and endears the union between husband and wife. It encourages and directs parents in the instruction and government of their household. It heightens the gratitude, docility, and submission of children. It excites and aids brethren to "dwell together in unity." That family, whose heads and members bear each other in mind at their secret devotions; and, frequently appearing before God in company, jointly call upon his name for a supply of their individual and collective wants, must, of course, be impressed with a sense of their respective obligations; which will pervade every domestick transaction, alleviate every burden, and increase every joy.

3. To pray for our neighbours and acquaintances, with whom we have occasional dealings and intercourse, checks the ebulitions of envy, emulation and strife, and induces a kind, equitable, and generous deportment toward all around us.

After entering into our closets, or uniting with our families to intercede for the prosperity and happiness of others, in common with our own, can we harbour a propensity to counteract these intercessions, by fraud and injustice ; by taking advantage of the ignorance and necessity of a brother ; or by insidiously undermining his reputation, and opposing his success in the world ? Can the aspect of his superiour wealth and splendour prove to us a source of regret, or a motive to hostility ? Can we even wish to rise to opulence and honour at his expense ? No : we shall rejoice in the displays of divine goodness, wherever they appear ; and, though less distinguished ourselves, we shall neither desire nor dare to " fight against God," by robbing the recipients of his bounty, either of the possession or enjoyment of the blessings which he has allotted them. Actuated by that " charity, which is the bond of perfectness, all things, whatsoever we would that men

should do unto us, we shall do even so unto them." The collisions of personal interest and enterprize, instead of unduly irritating our spirits, or provoking our resentment, whilst they render us more importunate for that "wisdom from above, which is profitable to direct," and suggest the propriety of additional petitions in behalf of our rivals, will call forth our unwearied vigilance, activity, and resolution to avoid every injurious design and perpetration, and adhere, with undeviating rectitude, to the dictates of truth and righteousness.

4. To pray for our enemies transforms hatred to benevolence, and revenge to pity.

When our indignation is roused by the discovery and contemplation of unmerited injury, could we prevail on ourselves, instead of "rendering evil for evil," to "commit our cause to the Lord," and implore the influence of his grace to show the offender "the errour of his ways," and bring him to the exercise of the christian temper, it would, at least, calm our minds, and guard us against those violent sallies of passion, by which animosity is so often reciprocated, and contending parties ultimately involved in equal guilt and suffering. The presence of an omniscient God would remind us of our own imperfections,

and furnish the most powerful arguments to "be kind and tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us." Our prayer, like that of David, in similar circumstances, would "return into our own bosom;" and fill us, not with the malignant purpose to "do so to him, as he had done to us," but with that commiseration and tenderness, which are calculated to soften the asperity, and conciliate the friendship of the most obdurate mind. "All that envenomed rancour," says a judicious writer,* "which is apt to imbitter our spirits against mankind in general, and our enemies in particular, when we suffer, or think we suffer undeservedly, will abate and die away, as we strive to set our affections on things above. Our thoughts, like the waters of the sea when exhaled towards heaven, will lose their offensive bitterness and salt, leave behind them each distasteful quality, and sweeten into an amiable humanity and candour, till they descend in gentle showers of love and kindness upon our fellow creatures."

5. To pray for our country superadds a christian principle to the exertions of patriot-

* Seed.

ism, and renders our conduct as citizens consistent and virtuous.

Were all civil transactions brought to this test; were men never to espouse or abet a project connected with the commonweal, till they had retired and "asked counsel of God;" entreating him to direct their steps, and give an issue to their intentions and actions, favourable to the happiness of the nation, most of the ills, by which kingdoms and states are so often infested, convulsed, and dismembered would disappear. The politician, however mistaken in his theory, would not dare to seek elevation by intrigue and falschood; nor consent to sacrifice the publick good to the views of personal interest and aggrandizement. The citizen, though still exposed to errour, would distinguish between the furious impulse of party zeal, and a patriotick resolution to assert and defend his rights. He would not, therefore, be led blindfold in the disposal of his suffrage; but act with deliberation, and weigh the moral, as well as the political, character of rival candidates for office. Looking for a blessing both on his own person, and on the community at large, to the great arbiter of the universe, who "requires truth in the inward parts," he would be persuaded, in no

instance, to dispense with a reverential respect to the divine authority. His obedience to the laws of the land would be prompted by a religious motive, and he would "be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." False patriots and infatuated partizans may neglect and despise this duty. The forger brings not his counterfeit coin to the true die. None, however, who is not perverted or enslaved by degrading and criminal passions, can be insensible of its utility. By recalling to remembrance our mutual dependence and obligations; and by extending our thoughts beyond the present scene, when the petty contests for worldly distinction and emolument shall be no more, and "we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," it excites and aids us to "serve our generation by the will of God."

In seasons of publick agitation, when, to use the bold and figurative language of scripture, "all the foundations of the earth are out of course," and a spirit of licentious innovation threatens the destruction of social order and safety, prayer leads the mind to rest on the great sovereign of the universe, who brings light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and good out of evil; who has wise,

important, and gracious purposes to answer by the most mysterious and alarming events; and who will assuredly cause "all things to work together for good to them that love him."

Such, in the diversified conditions and relations of life, are the beneficial effects of prayer.

III. What then remains, but that we conclude agreeably to the third division of the subject, by enforcing its uniform and devout practice, in all its branches?

1. Publick prayer, or that which composes a material part of the weekly services of the sanctuary, is a most solemn and interesting duty. There "the rich and poor meet together," and unitedly address that God, who is "the maker of them all." There we acknowledge the father of our spirits and former of our bodies, in a social capacity; confess our unworthiness of the least of his mercies; implore the forgiveness of our sins, and entreat his protection and favour, in behalf of ourselves, our families, our friends, our country, and the whole race of man. Now what can be more reasonable, and, if devoutly performed, what can be more beneficial than this

service? Is it not a just tribute to the adorable majesty of heaven and earth? Is it not adapted to impress our minds with a becoming sense of our relation to him and one another? Is it not essential to the existence and preservation of religion in the world? Yet how frequently is it neglected entirely, or attended with the coldest indifference! "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." Our approaches to God in his house, to be acceptable, must be sincere; to be salutary, must be constant. "Forsake not," therefore, "the assembling yourselves together, as the manner of some is;" nor think it sufficient to appear before the Most High, and place yourselves in the attitude of devotion; but take heed that your hearts be engaged. Consider in whose presence you stand; and let "his dread fall upon you, and his excellency make you afraid." Suffer not your thoughts to wander to the ends of the earth; but hear, and join in every pertinent petition and ascription of praise. This is an offering, which you owe to "the rock of your salvation," as members of a christian community.

2. In your domestick state, many blessings are to be recognized and sought, and many imperfections to be lamented and de-

plored, which it would be improper to bring into publick view. Hence the expediency and obligation of family prayer.

"Upon this point," to speak in the words of an eminent divine of our own country,* "we shall have few to oppose us, except those who, from a disinclination to religion itself, and to every expression of it, desire to frame excuses for their neglect. If social worship is ever reasonable, nature itself will lead us to family religion. Who are so adapted to unite together in exercises of devotion, as they who are united together in some very near relation, or in the most intimate bonds of friendship; one of which we must suppose the case with all, who are of the same family? These best know each other's circumstances, cares, and difficulties; and, therefore, can more properly join in praying with, and for each other. They have many wants, which they may, in a united manner, seek to have supplied. They have many common mercies, which demand their thankful acknowledgments. They are usually affected by the same afflictions, which ought to lead them to God for help and support.

* Dr. Andrew Eliot, late of Boston.

"When we have been carried through the passages of the day, and are met together in our common habitation, that we may again separate for our necessary repose, what can be more fit and decent, than that we should, with one heart and voice, bless God for the favours and protections of the day, humble ourselves for our miscarriages, and implore his care through the silent watches of the night? When, in the morning, we arise from our beds, how natural is it, before we enter on the business of the day, to return our thanks to him, who has protected us in our defenceless hours; to ask the direction, care, and blessing of our heavenly father; and to commit ourselves to his guidance and influence, through the business and temptations of the day."

Awfully alarming are the denunciations of Jehovah, not only "upon the heathen, who know him not;" but "upon the families that call not on his name." Think not then, that you can be innocent or safe, whilst you omit and delay this reasonable duty; but be persuaded to resolve, each one for himself, "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

3. As the peculiar situation of every family requires appropriate addresses to heaven,

so the wants and failings of each individual suggest the importance and fitness of secret prayer. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy." In many cases our anxieties and hopes are all our own. To utter them before any human being might subject us to the imputation of weakness, or otherwise produce injurious effects. In some cases, to offer up those petitions, which conscience dictates for our dearest connexions, in their presence and hearing, might rather irritate than improve; and, in all cases, when secluded from every other eye and ear, we "pray to our father, who seeth in secret," we may feel and indulge a freedom, which is unknown, when associated with the smallest number of fellow creatures. Oh! how enlivening to our happy prospects! how quieting to our distracted fears! how soothing to our afflictive sorrows, to leave the world and all its inhabitants behind, and draw near to an almighty friend, who "knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust;" to pour out our whole souls in his presence; and to "cast all our cares upon him!"

This, moreover, is the best criterion, by which to prove our sincerity. The person, who spends his solitary moments without once raising his thoughts and desires to God, can neither claim the reputation, nor expect the reward, of true piety. Though he attend, or even make prayers on other occasions, "to be seen of men" may be the motive. But if we accustom ourselves to those retired acts of devotion, "which the world knows not of," there is reason to believe that the "one thing needful" is an object of our serious concern. This, too, is the most useful preparation both for family and publick worship. It fixes the attention, solemnizes the mind, and adds fervour to our joint supplications, in company with those, whom, in retirement, we have previously commended to God. Avail yourselves, therefore, of this powerful incentive to the acquisition and improvement of the christian character. Let its returns be regular and frequent; otherwise it will be neglected and forgotten.

4. There is yet another method of approaching God, usually denominated mental prayer, which no circumstance of time or place need to prevent. The most busy can-

not plead the want of leisure, nor the most diffident the want of ability. Wherever we are, and however occupied, the displays of divine power, wisdom, and goodness call us to adoration, praise, and gratitude. The whole earth is a spacious temple, full of images far better calculated to excite devout sentiments and wishes, than all the exhibitions of sculpture and painting, which have adorned churches. These we may recognize, without obstruction to our secular pursuits; and in the midst of business and company, may offer up correspondent ejaculations of piety, without the formality of utterance. "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth: Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." How many, and how great are the benefits to be derived from this practice! What a security it would prove against the numberless temptations to anger, licentiousness, and excess, to which we are exposed! And how much more becoming, dignified, and virtuous, when assailed by unexpected danger, insult, or injury, to flee in silent aspirations to the sovereign preserver of men and avenger of wrongs for direction, than, as too often happens, to "speak unadvisedly with our lips," and give indulgence to malignant and

criminal passions? By this mean, we instant transport ourselves into the conscious presenc of an omniscient God, and are led to act an "endure, as seeing him that is invisible."

Say not that you are too degenerate an sinful to pray. That were to plead one crim in excuse for another; and allege, as a wa rant for negligence, the very fact which re ders it indispensably incumbent upon you "pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of you hearts may be forgiven you." The gosp gives no encouragement of salvation indepe dent of this condition. "Be careful for notl ing, therefore; but in every thing by pray and supplication, with thanksgiving, let you requests be made known to God."

SERMON IV.

ON THE RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

MARK ii. 27.

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

IT is a fact too often overlooked and forgotten, that all the institutions and commands of the gospel are adapted to our benefit. There are instances, in which even the serious and devout appear to consider a conformity to them, as a service exacted by the Most High, for his own sake. Hence it happens, that some overrate the exertions of obedience, as if, by them, they contributed to augment the essential glory and happiness of their maker; whilst others view and exhibit religion in a garb of melancholy and gloom, interdicting the cheerful enjoyment of life, and imposing perpetual sacrifices to "an austere and hard mas-

ter, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strowed." True indeed it is, that when our convenience and gratification come in competition with the will and law of God, and it is not to be dissembled that such cases may occur, it is incumbent on us to "deny ourselves, and take up our cross:" Nor can we deserve the name, or anticipate the reward of disciples, if we refuse. Generally speaking, however, our comfort and our duty are inseparably connected; and to perform the one is most effectually to promote the other. In the rare and special cases, when they interfere, the mortification to which we are called, without excluding present consolation, is professedly calculated to promote our future welfare. "There is no man, that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

The sabbath is an institution peculiarly adapted, as well to mitigate the sufferings and heighten the blessings of this pilgrimage state, as to improve our virtue, and prepare us for immortal bliss beyond the grave. This is more than implied in the text. The pharisees,

who placed a superstitious confidence in externals, had charged the disciples with a crime, because, to satisfy the unavoidable cravings of nature, "they plucked ears of corn on the sabbath day." To obviate this charge, and prove that under the law, to which they appealed, ceremonial observances and positive rites were always esteemed subordinate to the indispensable necessities of life, our saviour alleges that well known passage in David's history, in which we are told, that "when he had need and was an hungered, he went into the house of God, and did eat the shew bread, which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests; and gave also to them that were with him." He then applies the argument by adding, "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." It originated in a benevolent regard to our happiness, and was intended by infinite wisdom and goodness, at once to afford us relaxation from the toils and cares of the world, and to aid our improvement, as rational, moral, and accountable agents. To suppose, therefore, on the one hand, that it "lades men with burdens grievous to be borne;" or, on the other, that it furnishes them with opportunities and pretexts for licentious indulgence, would be alike absurd;

alike inconsistent with the character of its glorious author, and the duty of those, for whose advantage it was ordained.

The correctness of this construction will be illustrated by a brief consideration of the several ends proposed by the sacred writers, in the observation of the sabbath.

I. The first idea, under which the sabbath is represented in scripture, is that of a day appropriated to rest. "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates."* This is an establishment full of mercy, if we regard only its temporal influence. Such is the eagerness, with which multitudes desire and seek the emoluments of this sublunary abode, that were these emoluments suffered without interruption, to engross our attention, and call forth our activity, not the indigent and servile only, but the affluent and prosperous would, in many instances, "pursue them to their own death." Do we not find that the worldly minded are seldom, or never, satisfied with

* Exod. xx. 9, 10.

their present acquisitions ? As they climb the summit of fortune, and the prospect extends around them, are not their wishes excited, and their wants multiplied by the successive appearance of objects, unperceived in the vale below ? If then, no regular intervals of relaxation occurred, how many thousands, who are now refreshed by the frequent return of the sabbath, would madly destroy their health, and hasten their dissolution ! To the poor, incessant toil, with all its attendant evils, would become necessary and inevitable. Their reward would be gradually diminished in proportion as the period of practicable service was prolonged; and they would soon be constrained to bear the fatigue of seven days to procure the same pittance which they now earn in six. The only change in their condition would therefore prove an increase of labour and suffering.

But the benefit of abstaining from the common occupations of life, though more sensibly felt by the laborious, is not confined to any particular class of society. It furnishes a useful respite to all, and serves to recruit and invigorate the spirits for future application and industry. " There cannot be a

more pleasing, or a more consolatory idea presented to the human mind, than that of one universal pause of labour throughout the christian world, at the same moment of time; diffusing rest, comfort, and peace through a large part of the habitable globe, and affording ease and refreshment not only to our own species, but to the brute creation. Even these are enabled to join in this silent act of adoration, this mute kind of homage to the great Lord of all; and although they are incapable of any sentiments of religion, yet by this mean they become sharers in the blessings of it. Every man of the least sensibility must feel the beauty and utility of such an institution as this; and must see, at the same time, the cruelty of invading this most valuable privilege, and breaking in upon that sacred repose, which God himself has given. It was a point in which it highly became the majesty and goodness of heaven itself to interpose:"* And it demands, in return, our undissembled gratitude and obedience. This obedience consists not, however, in mere inaction. We are called to bodily rest, not only to refresh our animal nature, but that our minds, unincumbered by earth born cares

* See Bishop Porteus' sermon on Deut. v. 12.

and pursuits, may be free to explore the works and ways of God.

II. Pursuant to this remark, a second end proposed in the observation of the sabbath is to perpetuate a devout sense and acknowledgment of the wonders of creation. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it."*

Here a subject of the highest sublimity and grandeur invites our attention, and calls for our private and publick ascriptions of praise to God. "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead." Assisted by these manifestations of his glory, we may confirm our convictions of his existence, and rectify and enlarge our apprehensions both of his character and our own. "When," says pious David, "when I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?"

* Exod. xx. 11.

The splendid appearance, the magnificent arrangement, and the salutary influence of the celestial bodies, connected with the useful vicissitudes and productions of the globe we inhabit, tend to inspire sentiments of the profoundest veneration and love for that almighty, munificent Being, "who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." Overwhelmed by the numberless displays of his inherent excellence and perfection, we feel ourselves to be "less than nothing, and vanity before him;" and our wonder and thankfulness are equally excited by the abundant evidence, with which we are furnished of his parental favour and indulgence to our race. When we reflect on the ample provision, which is made for our subsistence and comfort, and realize that the whole system of nature is adapted to our circumstances and wants; when we contemplate the curious structure of our bodies and the capacious powers of our minds, we are conscious of the relation in which we stand to "the father of spirits," and of our consequent obligations to him and one another. Motives to habitual piety and virtue, which can be derived from no other source, are called into vigorous action.

Is it not, then, a becoming and needful practice frequently to suspend the selfish projects of personal and momentary interest, and direct our thoughts to the beneficent author and rightful sovereign of the universe? Angels and archangels cast down their crowns before the throne, and unite in those seraphick strains, "Worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: For thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are and were created." And shall man refuse to inquire, "Where is God my maker?" Shall man disregard the return of that holy day, which reminds him of his derivation from the greatest and best of beings, and inculcates the delightful duty of "praising the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works?" To prompt the faithful discharge of this duty is the design and tendency of the sabbath. It was instrumental of preserving the knowledge and worship of the true God among the Israelites; and it is manifestly conducive and efficacious to the same purpose among christians.

III. A third end proposed in the observation of the sabbath is the devout recollection and acknowledgment of an overruling provi-

dence. "Remember that thou wast a servant in Egypt, and that the Lord brought thee out thence with a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day."*

I am aware that this reason has been generally supposed peculiar to the Jews. Their emancipation from Egyptian bondage was indeed peculiar to them: And so, in the nature of things, most of the special mercies of all other times and places are peculiar to the individuals and nations on whom they are conferred. Yet to receive and enjoy providential blessings, suited to their respective conditions and necessities, is the exclusive privilege of no person or people under the sun. "All eyes wait on God, and he satisfieth the desire of every living thing. His tender mercies are over all his works;" and "he hath not left himself without witness" to any region of the earth. Beside the common tokens of his love, which are renewed to us every moment, we can easily call to remembrance a variety of signal interpositions in our behalf, both in a personal and social capacity. If, then, the exertion of divine power, for the enlargement

* Deut. v. 15.

of the chosen tribes, inferred an obligation upon them to "keep the sabbath day," why should not the many benefits and deliverances, with which we are favoured, bind us to a similar practice? We, like them, are frail, imperfect, sinful creatures; prone not only to "forget the God that made us," but "lightly to esteem the rock of our salvation." Amidst the hurry and business of the week, how often do we disregard that invisible hand, which defends us from threatening dangers, and "gives us our meat in due season?" Is it not, therefore, a desirable, as well as a wise and benevolent ordination, that a day, consecrated to religion, should often occur, to arrest our wandering thoughts, and afford us leisure to review the transactions of the intervening period; to trace the footsteps of a kind providence in our preservation and support; and, in the closet, family, and sanctuary, to call upon our souls to "bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits?"

IV. A fourth end proposed in the observation of the sabbath is the commemoration of the great work of our redemption.

This is a dispensation so interesting in its nature and consequences, that divine wisdom has seen cause to honour it by a change of

holy time from the seventh to the first day of the week; the day, on which the great "captain of our salvation" rose from the dead. For this change the apostle to the Hebrews assigns a reason, similar, both in import and expression, to that on which its first institution was grounded. "There remaineth therefore," says he, "a rest," in the original, a sabbath, "for the people of God. For he, that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own work, as God did from his." The christian church has accordingly observed this new era from the beginning. On the very day of the resurrection, the disciples were assembled together to worship: On the next "first day of the week," they met again for the same purpose: And on the day of pentecost, which being fifty days after the passover, was also "the first day of the week, they were all with one accord in one place;" when "they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance;" and when "about three thousand souls were added unto them" by the sermon of Peter. After this the same custom seems to have prevailed among the gentile converts. At Troas "up-

first day of the week, when the disciples
ogether to break bread, Paul preached
iem." That the same day was observ-
he Corinthian church, appears from the
ons of the apostle relative to a collection
poor, "on the first day of the week."
St. John wrote the book of Revela-
it had generally obtained the name of
Lord's day;" and by this name it has
nown and distinguished in all succeed-
es.*
iis alteration of time, instead of weak-
the moral reasons which before existed
sabbath, not only leaves them in their
ength, but adds a new and weighty mo-
its religious observance. Beside the
of creation and providence, that aston-
dispensation of grace in Jesus Christ,
ich "life and immortality are brought
it," is presented to our minds. The
h has now become a kind of anticipation
edge of the uninterrupted rest, peace,
oy in reversion for the faithful. While
inds us of the gratitude and allegiance,
we owe to him who "was delivered
r offences, and arose also for our justifi-

* two sermons on the sabbath, by the late Dr. Belk-
15, 16.

cation," it guides our thoughts to those "mansions of his Father's house, which he has gone before to prepare;" where "all that love his appearing," free from the toils and distresses of this sinful state, shall dwell forever at his right hand. It therefore suggests the strongest arguments to "lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come:" and "labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

But for this benevolent institution, the advantages of the christian revelation had been sensibly diminished. Most men are so deeply immersed in business or pleasure, that they would seldom spend a thought upon their God and Saviour; seldom recollect their dependence and obligations, were they not brought to a pause by the periodical recurrence of the sabbath. This leads many, who would otherwise continue to "walk in the way of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes," to consider the nature and circumstances of their being, and "live henceforth not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again."

The sabbath has been sometimes conceived and represented as a mere positive ordi-

nance, binding indeed on the Jews, but of little consequence to the rest of mankind. This delusion is fully exposed and refuted in the preceding observations. In them it appears, 1. Not as a positive, but as a moral duty.

By a moral duty we mean "that which is in itself rational, and fit to be done, though there were no express command to enjoin it: By a positive duty, that which is observed only because it is commanded, and has no intrinsick goodness to recommend it. The former are commanded because good, the latter are good because commanded. Certain it is, that a convenient portion of our time is due to the service and worship of God by natural right. And could we ourselves, had it been left to us, have set apart less time than God hath done? The law of nature does not, indeed, dictate to us any particular day, one more than another;" and this is the only point, in which the precept can be esteemed positive. "We are evidently as much bound to keep a sabbath as the Jews were, though not to the exact circumstances of the day. The equity is the same to us, as it was to them, that we should allow one day in seven to the worship of that God, who so liberally allows us six for our

ordinary affairs." The ease and refreshment of our bodies from the labours of our calling is now as necessary as it was then; and we are still as much obliged with thankfulness to remember and meditate upon the great mercy of our creation," and preservation, "as they were."* The wonders of redeeming love, which even "the angels desire to look into," and which "many prophets and righteous men desired to see, and saw not," are, to us, an additional inducement and obligation. These alone might be sufficient to attach our hearts to the consecrated hours; and excite us to welcome their arrival in the rapturous strains of inspiration, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will be glad and rejoice in it."

2. It hence becomes a question of interesting moment to all, In what manner is the sabbath to be sanctified?

In answer to this question, we shall not contend for that rigorous and absolute rest, which was imposed upon the children of Israel in the wilderness, where they were forbidden even to "kindle a fire in their habitations." To this they themselves appear to

* See Bishop Burnet's sermon on the fourth commandment.

have been no longer subject, than whilst they were fed with manna from heaven. It will be readily conceded, for so the gospel teaches, that they were under a yoke of bondage, from which christians are happily exempt. Our blessed master, as in other respects, so in regard to the sabbath, has taught us, both by word and deed, the extent of that "liberty wherewith he hath made us free. It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day." Acts of necessary beneficence to ourselves, to our fellow beings, and even to the brute creation, may, and ought to be performed. This is evident from the case, with which our text is connected, and from numerous other passages of evangelical history. It is, nevertheless, the indisputable pleasure of our head and king, that, excepting these special exigencies, the common employments of life should be entirely suspended. Such is the language of his invariable practice. Never did he interrupt the rest of the sabbath, but by deeds of mercy and compassion, the immediate performance of which was apparently expedient and proper. No kind of labour, therefore, if we are to "follow his steps," is to be undertaken or accomplished, on this day, which present ne-

cessity does not require; and to defer till then, what might and ought to be achieved during the week, is to "rob God" of the time and service, which he challenges to himself.

The benefits of this sacred rest are graciously extended to the beasts of the field: It is consequently an additional infringement of its sanctity to commence and prosecute needless journies, either of business or pleasure. Is this an unseasonable remark? Are there none, in our times, who, because the law of the land prohibits their ordinary pursuits, as if no higher duties were incumbent upon them, employ the sabbath in making excursive visits; not always as a mere pastime, but, in many cases, for the sake of transacting worldly concerns? What mean the "rumbling of wheels," and the "trampling of horses," which so often disturb our publick solemnities? Do they not, in a voice, like thunder, proclaim the licentiousness of the age in which we live? Do they not disclose the reason, why so "few come to the feasts of Zion?"

Every species of dissipation, on the sabbath, is unfriendly to the temporal as well as to the spiritual interests of mankind. Those, who, not content with the rest which reason

and religion prescribe, must be surrounded by heedless companions, and fare more sumptuously than at other times, not unfrequently fall, by swift degrees, into intemperance and excess; contract an invincible aversion to industrious occupation during the rest of the week; become habitually profligate and unprincipled in their manners; and beguile themselves at once of the possession and prospect of all rational enjoyment. I doubt not but many, perhaps most of those licentious, useless mortals, who have learnt to "glory in their shame," and dare to deride every thing serious and sacred, can trace their degradation and wretchedness to this fruitful source of mischief. Nor let it be imagined that any one class of society is exclusively exposed to this danger. Generally speaking, every person, who wantonly violates the sabbath, may, from that moment, date his decline in virtue and reputation, if not in fortune. Should he escape the grosser enormities of vice, it must be the effect, not of principle, but of education. This is a righteous retribution of divine providence: For as the day was designed, as well to promote our bodily comfort, as to aid our progress in piety and good morals, its profanation naturally and justly tends to the destruc-

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tion of both. Avoid, therefore, and discountenance this growing evil. Accustom yourselves to a state of readiness for the return of holy time; and free as possible from the distractions of the world, devote the day to God. Remember, that abstinence from labour and diversion is required, not only to recruit your strength and spirits for subsequent exertion; but to give you opportunity to commune with your own hearts, and raise your unincumbered affections and desires from earth to heaven. Waste not the morning in idle slumbers; but hail its approach with pious alacrity, and improve its hours in those personal and domestick offices of devotion, and in that serious attention to the works and word of God, which shall prepare you, in due time, for an acceptable appearance before him, with the congregation of his people. For we are to recollect,

3. That publick, no less than private exercises of religion are comprised in the acceptable observance of the sabbath.

Man is a social being. Each individual of the species is intimately connected with surrounding brethren; subject to similar wants, and favoured with similar mercies. This bond of union proves the propriety of joint acknowledgments and supplications to the common fa-

ther of all. Pursuant to this dictate of reason, "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary," are the combined injunctions of inspiration. The one is exhibited as the obvious result of the other: and so, indeed, it is; for they are naturally associated together in every mind, acquainted with the gospel of Christ. Such has been the prevailing sentiment of christians in all ages of the church. "By this means it comes to pass that many millions of people, in almost every region of the earth, are at the same time engaged in prostrating themselves before the throne of grace, and offering up their sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to the common Lord of all, in whom they live, and move, and have their being.

"There is, in this view of the Lord's day, something so wonderfully awful and magnificent, that one would think it almost impossible for any man to resist the inclination he must find in himself to join in this general assembly of the human race; "to go with the multitude," as the psalmist expresses it, "into the house of God;" and to take part in a solemnity so striking to the imagination, so suitable to the majesty of heaven, so adapted

to the wants, the necessities, the infirmities, the obligations, and the duties of a created and a dependent being." Yet "we see continually, that the most trivial pretences of weather, of indisposition, of business, of company; pretences, which would not be suffered to interfere, one moment, with any favourite pursuit or amusement, are thought reasons of sufficient weight to justify us in slighting the express commands, and deserting the service of our maker and redeemer."*

Instead of falling into this criminal indifference and neglect, let me beseech you habitually to "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." Be "glad, when they say unto you, let us go into the house of the Lord," and "take the most earnest heed to the things which you hear, lest at any time you should let them slip. Dismiss not, when you leave the courts of the Lord, the impressions of seriousness which may have been made upon your minds; nor lose the remembrance of the important truths, to which you have listened. This reminds us,

* See Bishop Porteus' sermon on Exod. v. 12.

4. That the duties of the sabbath do not end with the publick services of the day. Deep reflection should follow, as well as precede our solemn approaches to God. To retire from his presence in a thoughtless frame of levity; and, as too often happens, plunge immediately into frivolous conversation, dissipating amusement, or worldly business, is a daring affront to his authority, and a fatal obstruction to our improvement. Such persons, "like the man beholding his natural face in a glass, behold themselves, and go their way, and straightway forget what manner of men they were." This is one of the most common and influential causes of that shameful insensibility to divine things, which so generally prevails among mankind. "The cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choak the word, and they become unfruitful."

When you seek light and counsel in sublunary concerns, you do not turn from your advisers, and think no more of the subject. You view and review it, in all its different aspects, relations, and dependencies; and you spare neither time nor pains fully to understand and advantageously to apply it. Pursue the same course, in quest of religious instruction; employ the retired hours of each successive

sabbath in pondering the lessons you rece
in testing your hearts and lives by the ora
of divine truth, in imploring grace and as
ance to see and forsake your errours;
"your path, like the shining light, shall s
more and more unto the perfect day."
"if thou turn away thy foot from doing
pleasure on my holy day; and call the
bath a delight, the holy of the Lord, hon
able; and shalt honour him, not doing t
own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure,
speaking thine own words: Then shalt
delight thyself in the Lord, and I will c
thee to ride upon the high places of the e
and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob
father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spc
it."

SERMON V.

ON PUBLICK WORSHIP.

JOHN XX. 24.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

AFTER the death of our blessed Lord, it was the uniform practice of his disciples, on the first day of the week, a day which has ever since been held sacred among christians, to meet together, and unite in prayer to God for the direction and aid of his spirit, and consult the scriptures for their mutual instruction and edification. At this time, and for these purposes, they were assembled, when Mary Magdalene brought the welcome tidings of their crucified Master's resurrection, and when Jesus himself made his first appearance to them, with that endearing salutation, "Peace be unto you."

On this occasion Thomas, one of their number, was unhappily absent; and, of course, lost that convincing evidence, with which the rest were furnished, that the despised Galilean, whom he had followed, was indeed the Messiah, and Saviour of the world. Hence, as we are told in the sequel of the story, he continued unbelieving, till his doubts were removed by an instance of condescension and grace, no less undeserved than extraordinary. When he was informed of the fact, instead of giving credence to the information, he pertinaciously replied, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Had not the compassionate Redeemer seen fit to comply with this extravagant demand; at least, had he not deigned, by some incontestible proof, to demonstrate the identity of his person, and the consequent divinity of his mission and religion, Thomas had, in all human probability, "made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience."

From the words thus briefly exhibited in their connexions, we may remark, first, the duty of assembling for social and publick worship; and, secondly, the danger of neglecting,

in contrast with the advantage of improving, the seasons appropriated to this service: Whence, thirdly, will result the most powerful motives to a constant and conscientious attendance at the sanctuary.

I. We are, first, to remark the duty of assembling for social and publick worship.

This practice is not only authorized, but recommended and enforced by the apostolick example, to which the text alludes; and which is repeatedly mentioned in other parts of the gospel history. Customs which prevailed in the early ages of the church, before christianity was corrupted by the superstitious inventions and traditions of men, are generally and justly considered as inferring an obligation upon us to "go, and do likewise." Certainly then, those customs, which were adopted by the immediate companions of Christ, by those, who enjoyed the privilege of his personal presence and counsel, and who could not be ignorant of the rules and orders of his kingdom, deserve our unreserved and cheerful adoption. Had we no other authority than the religious convocations of the primitive disciples, on this ground alone we might safely rest the propriety and obligation of christian worship. This, however, is not our only

warrant. To place the duty in a still more clear and convincing light, and to obviate every possible objection, numerous exhortations and injunctions are found in the sacred pages, which speak a language exactly coincident with this ancient usage. "Let us consider one another," says the apostle to the Hebrews, "to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." To multiply quotations of this import would be easy, but needless. Open your bibles, and peruse their inspired contents, and you cannot overlook them.

The practice contended for has the sanction of reason, as well as of revelation. Publick offices of religion are not peculiar to the christian economy. All ages and nations of men have had their forms of external worship and adoration, which, however erroneous, in themselves considered, prove, at least, that the principle is founded in nature. The gospel corrects these errours, and carries this natural principle into its just conclusions. Here we are taught, that "the hour is now come, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." Here, too,

we are informed "wherewith to come before the Lord, and bow ourselves before the most high God." We are not, like the heathen, to imagine the solemn exercises, to which we are called, an equivalent for the blessings we need and seek; for "we cannot be profitable to the Almighty, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself and his neighbour." Exalted above all praise, our sublimest anthems can never describe, much less increase his essential glory. To "tread his courts," and gratefully recognize his being, perfections, and government; to magnify the riches of his goodness with the congregation of his people; to hear the messages of his grace; and jointly to implore his forgiveness and favour, though expressions of homage, submission, and dependence, every way becoming our condition, are nevertheless calculated solely for our benefit; and tend, by the benevolent ordination of heaven to our improvement and salvation. To omit them, therefore, is at once to betray a thankless indifference to the parent and benefactor of creation, and expose ourselves to the perpetual dominion and punishment of sin.

II. We hence proceed, secondly, to remark the danger of neglecting, in contrast

with the advantage of improving the seasons appropriated to social and publick worship.

This danger is strikingly displayed in the case of Thomas. He was not with the other disciples, when Jesus came. Whilst, therefore, by the sight of their risen Lord, they, who had before been equally diffident and desponding, were established in the faith; for want of this evidence and support, which, but for his own neglect, had been vouchsafed to him at the same time, he was left still a prey to gloomy uncertainty, and perplexing doubt.

Here is exhibited, in a manner well adapted to rouse our attention and enkindle our zeal, the risk we run by relaxing our diligence, in the use of those means, which divine wisdom and goodness have prescribed to aid our progress in piety and virtue. For although we discard the reveries of enthusiastick pretenders, who boast of supernatural visions and revelations, and arrogantly condemn all who do not profess some mysterious intercourse with heaven, through the medium of their bodily senses; yet, that by the worship and ordinances of the gospel, the Holy Ghost renews the heart, and sanctifies the will and affections, is a rational, consistent, and scriptural assertion.

This is the ordinary and stated method, in which the benefits of redemption are communicated, the new man formed, and the divine life sustained. Independent of this method, it is presumption to expect the forgiveness and acceptance of our maker. Even those, who are necessarily detained from the house of prayer and its attendant privileges, are deprived of many comforts and helps, which they might otherwise enjoy. Such detention is, therefore, deprecated by every considerate and serious mind, as a grievous frown of providence. How deplorable, then, must be the moral state of those, who pay no regard to the returning periods of worship, but suffer them to pass unnoticed and unimproved! Though apprized of the way, in which God is wont to meet and bless his degenerate offspring, "they will not even frame their doings to turn unto him." In the exercise of this temper, what prospect can they have of converting grace? Will the lawgiver and judge of the world reward their ingratitude and sloth with a miraculous interposition for their deliverance from "the wrath to come?" Will he forcibly intrude his mercy upon them, whilst they turn a deaf ear to the calls and counsels of his love?

Would they consent to "wait at wisdom's gates," and "ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward," they might hope for every needful assistance to encourage and accelerate their progress. But since, instead of adopting this rational and prudent course, they slight and disregard those "glad tidings of great joy," which attune the voices of angels to praise; "forget the God that made them, and lightly esteem the rock of their salvation," may they not justly be "given over to a reprobate mind;" and left, "after their hardness and impenitent heart, to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

Here some, "willing to justify themselves," may inquire, 'To what extent would 'the preacher carry his ideas upon this sub-'ject? Would he be understood to intimate, 'that it is dangerous ever to absent ourselves 'from the sanctuary, when we could attend 'without material inconvenience? "Thus saying, he reproaches us also." For though we 'readily grant, that those, who rarely or never 'appear before the Lord, in his earthly temple, 'are without excuse, and imminently exposed 'to incurable impenitence and unbelief; yet 'we cannot conceive ourselves in equal, or

'even similar hazard, merely because we oc-
'casionally spend the whole, or a part of the
'sabbath, without joining in the publick so-
'lemnities of the day.'

In answer to this popular plea, let the perilous situation, into which Thomas was thrown, by a single instance of neglect, again speak and be heard. How much of the meek and docile spirit of christianity he apparently forfeited! How bold and unreasonable the scruples, which he imbibed and expressed! How presumptuous and arrogant the tone, in which he prescribed the kind of evidence, without which he would not believe! Happy for him, his delinquency did not grow into a settled habit. At their next convocation, he was present with his brethren; when, not for his sake alone, but for reasons which no longer exist; to demonstrate to all succeeding generations a fundamental article of our holy religion, the exacted proof was given.

But can you be certain of surmounting the dangers, which threatened his destruction, if you needlessly and frequently fall into the same errour? Is it not more than possible, that from these small beginnings, you may gradually advance to sceptical opinions and

conversation, and ultimately contract an unconquerable dislike and aversion to every species of religious observance? This, to say no more, is the ordinary process of apostacy from the faith; and has been repeatedly exemplified before our eyes. Among those, who ridicule every expression and appearance of devotion, how often do we find men, who once revered the name and worship of God, and, of course, supported a respectable and useful character; men, whose degeneracy visibly commenced with their inattention to the sacred institutions of the gospel. For want of that culture, which reason and scripture enjoin, they imperceptibly lost their tenderness of conscience, and convictions of truth and duty; and learnt, not the language only, but the sentiments and crimes of infidelity. The excesses of unbelief, like noxious weeds in the uncultivated soil, spontaneously arise in the heart, and obstruct the growth of every virtuous principle when the offices of piety are suspended.

Suppose the best, however; that ye should be able to stop short of this deplorable result; and, like Thomas, finally to retain your integrity. Will you, therefore, suffer disadvantage by your occasional negligence? On the day when, in compliance with an in-

lent humour, or for the sake of receiving or paying a friendly visit, falsely so called, you shall absent yourselves, the publick services may be so peculiarly adapted to your circumstances, that were you present, your attention would be arrested, and your hearts and lives improved. Another opportunity, equally favourable, on all accounts, to the purpose, may never occur. For it is an undoubted fact, that a prayer, a sermon, or a small portion of either, rendered impressive by some attending incident of manner or occasion, may take deeper root in the mind, and produce more lasting and salutary fruits in the life, than volumes, in a different situation. In private, you may read devout discourses and exercises far more correct and pathetick, and yet continue unmoved and indifferent.

There is a solemnity in publick acts of devotion and worship, admirably calculated to meliorate the temper and manners. Our united acknowledgments of the existence and attributes of Jehovah, joined with our confessions of guilt and dependence, and our supplications for pardon and support, naturally tend to inspire and diffuse a spirit of undissembled piety and benevolence. Whilst we approach the throne *of divine* grace, as the children of

one common father, who, regardless of all earthly distinctions, "looketh on the heart;" and whilst we hearken to the parental addresses of his word, which proclaims the overtures of his mercy to our fallen race; and, at once beseeches us "in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God," and warns us of that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, which are revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men;" what but the most perverse insensibility can steel our hearts to that love of God and our neighbour, which "is the fulfilling of the law?" Can a more obvious, a more direct method be conceived for the production and increase of that reverence for his character, and attachment to the service of our maker; that humility and meekness, justice and charity, condescension and forbearance, in our social intercourse, which are alike indispensable to our present peace and future glory?

Of those, who statedly adopt this instituted method, "there are none, perhaps, who receive not, at least, some temporary impressions of religion, which, though they work not their entire and full effect; though they be soon choaked by the cares and pleasures of

the world, yet keep those cares and pleasures at a stand, and prevent them from swallowing up the soul in a total degeneracy. Others there are, no doubt, who, by their appearance here, are happily surprised into a sense of piety and religion; whose callous hearts are softened, and prepared for the impressions of divine grace, by the solemnity of publick worship; who came deaf to every call but that of decency and custom, but depart with a better sense of things on their minds, roused from their lethargy of soul, to listen to the warning voice, which bids them return to the right way, and walk in it.

"There is that strong and mutual connexion between the body and the soul, between the senses and imagination, the passions and the reason of mankind, that they uniformly act and re-act upon each other; and, by this mutual rebound, work effects, which, to a common eye, may seem almost miraculous. Is it not a general and just complaint, that the mind of man is drawn forcibly down from the contemplation of divine things, by the allurements of the outward senses? What lessons of morality have been given on this important topick? How often, and how powerfully have

mankind been exhorted to avoid every inviting temptation of sight and hearing; because these, working on the imagination and passions, do inevitably sink the soul into every sensual excess? Now so it hath happened, that many of these pious moralists, not penetrating into the full extent of the human frame, have branded the senses and imagination, as the natural enemies of all virtue; forgetting, that by a proper application, they might be inlisted in her service, and happily converted into natural instruments of the noblest purposes of religion. For as many objects of sense tend to debase the mind, so there are others which no less tend to exalt it. Hence indifferent things gain their efficacy; for as the soul, in common life, is too generally drawn down by earthly objects, so it is the province of publick religion to counterwork their operations, and elevate the mind to the contemplation of divine things, by external and solemn institutions. Thus the appointed times of worship will naturally put us in mind of the work to which we are called: The awful silence and solemnity of the house of God will naturally awaken those impressions of love and gratitude, those sentiments of humility and

submission, which are the proper foundations of unfeigned devotion.

" Beside these great effects, we must not forget the powerful influence of example, in the publick worship of God. By example I mean not only that which works by shame or emulation, nor that" exclusively, " which awakens cool reflection in the mind, by both which religion and piety are indeed often promoted ; but I mean that sympathy of soul so strongly prevalent in human nature, which, like fire among combustible matter, immediately runs through the mass, converting the whole to its own likeness. The passions are contagious. Fear, hope, grief, joy, exultation and rapture, shining forth in the countenance of our fellow creatures, strike themselves into our hearts, and awaken corresponding feelings in the soul. Thus the sight of a congregation seriously united in worship, naturally inspires additional degrees of piety and reverence. Every individual at once gives and receives new fervours of devotion ; a devotion far more animated than can easily be raised in the retirement of the closet. We become more ardent in prayer, more attentive in hearing ; and when," aided by " the powers of harmony," we speak forth the divine praise,

" our hearts are doubly warmed with grat tude, and then indeed do we worship the Lo in the beauty of holiness.

" Though each of these effects, when se arately considered, is of great weight; y when united, they receive still higher degre of usefulness and efficacy, especially when e forced by the power of custom. Those place actions, ceremonies, postures, forms of wo ship, to which we have been long accustome and to which we have habitually joined th ideas of reverence, piety, sanctity, gratitud and devotion, will always affect us in the mo warm and effectual manner."*

To these advantages, the hope of which i authorized by the nature and tendency of so cial worship, may be added the animatin prospect of a divine blessing, with which it i accompanied, as an institution of revealed re ligion. Since " the Lord loveth the gates o Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,' will he not afford his special presence and gra cious co-operation to those, who devoutly fre quent the place where his name is recorded The means, which his wisdom and goodnes

* See a sermon by John Brown, A. M. delivered at th dedication of St. James's Church in Whitehaven (England 1753.

have appointed, his power will prosper. Great and precious are the promises of the gospel on this subject. The constituted "Head over all things to the church" has declared, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He has not only assured his faithful ministers, that "he is with them alway even to the end of the world;" but to the smallest number of worshippers, "who shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask," he has engaged "it shall be done for them of his Father, who is in heaven. For," says he, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

If, therefore, we assiduously wait on God in the way of his own appointment, we have abundant reason to expect his concurrence and aid to "help our infirmities," and "guide us in the way everlasting:" But if we "set at naught his counsel, and will none of his reproof;" if we needlessly turn aside from his house and worship, we madly expose ourselves to be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

III. Whence, thirdly, the most powerful motives to a constant and conscientious attendance at the sanctuary arise to view.

To discover these motives, you need c
to recollect and realize the interesting tru
that have been dispensed. You have s
that the practice recommended is a matte
duty. Its obligation results from the co
tion and relations of our being, and is foun
in the reason and nature of things. The G
from whom we derived our existence,
whom we are indebted for all our blessi
and at whose dread tribunal we must give
account for all our conduct, " requires thi
our hands," not barely as a token of hom
and reverence to him; but as a mean of bri
ing us to a resemblance of his moral im
and law, and to a meetness for his ete
kingdom.

Were we sinless as angels, it would
be incumbent upon us, unitedly to " pr
the Lord for his goodness, and for his won
ful works to the children of men." I
however, from this is our real character.
are frail, imperfect, guilty creatures. W
need repeated instruction, admonition, and
citement, relative to " the things which
long to our peace;" and whoever imag
himself an exception from the rest of m
kind, and capable of maintaining " a c
science void of offence," independent of th

external aids, which are required in the volume of inspiration, "deceives his own heart." No man is either so well informed, or so virtuously disposed, but he may derive additional improvement from the publick offices of religion. How great and extensive soever may be his attainments without them; with them, these attainments would be yet more distinguished. Though he be literally wiser "than all his teachers," his mind may, notwithstanding, be "stirred up by way of remembrance," and directed to important, practical subjects, which might otherwise escape his notice, and fail of their proper fruits in his life and conversation. Meanwhile, he may both receive and communicate a more fervent piety and zeal, by associating with others in the solemn acts of devotion and worship. This being the design and tendency of the institution, in proportion to his rank and influence in society, he may, and he is bound in duty to give a sanction to the things that are excellent, at the same time that he promotes and accelerates his personal growth in grace.

If, therefore, you would not incur the imputation of inexcusable ingratitude to the glorious author and benefactor of your lives; if you would not betray a criminal indifference

to the dignity, perfection, and happiness,
which you were formed ; if you would av
the aggravated guilt and condemnation
slighting offered mercy, and " rejecting
counsel of God against yourselves ;" if y
would not become abettors and " partakers
other men's sins," you lack no inducement
an habitual, sincere, and exemplary obedie
in this particular.

You all wish to secure and enjoy the be
fits of redemption. There is none, but, in
hour of retirement and reflection, is constra
ed, with Balaam of old, to exclaim, " Let
die the death of the righteous, and let my
end be like his." Learn, then, to prize
improve the means, which, for this purpo
" a faithful creator" has ordained. Recolle
that, in the diligent use of these means,
virtues and graces of the christian charact
and a consequent title to " inheritance amc
them that are sanctified," are to be sought a
obtained. Whilst you rejoice in that div
and animating proclamation, " If thou seek
her as silver, and searchest for her as for
treasure, then shalt thou understand the f
of the Lord, and find the knowledge of Goc
guard against a faulty negligence and slo
by taking into serious and frequent conside

tion the advantage of improving, and the danger of neglecting seasons consecrated to the special service of God, and favourable to the choice and pursuit of "that good part which can never be taken away from you."

When indisposed to the publick exercises of religion, and tempted to refrain your foot from the courts of the Lord, pause first, and let meditations of the following import take possession of your heart: 'I am on probation 'for an endless eternity; in which, "accord-'ing to the deeds done in the body," ineffable 'joy, or inconceivable wo must be my por-'tion! and, "behold now is the acceptable 'time, behold now is the day of salvation." 'This may be the last sabbath I shall ever 'enjoy. Before the arrival of another, my 'fate may be unalterably fixed in the region 'of unbodied spirits; and I may wish in vain '"to see one of the days of the son of man." 'But if not, who knows but a word in sea-'son is now prepared; of the saving benefit 'of which an unnecessary absence might for-'ever deprive me? And h[illegible] O how could I 'endure the august scene of the final judg-'ment, should it then appear, that when no 'insurmountable obstacle made it impractica-

'ble, or even difficult, by refusing to "seek 'the Lord, while he might be found," and to '"call upon him while he was near," I had 'perversely forfeited an unfading crown of 'righteousness, and subjected myself to the 'awful destiny of "hypocrites and unbe-'lievers?"

Under these impressions, how absurd and guilty would the usual pleas for delinquency be found! Were they duly contemplated and cherished, neither idleness nor amusement, neither business nor pleasure, would seduce you from the worship and ordinances of the gospel. Instead of forming excuses, or exclaiming, "What a weariness is it?" you would "be glad when they said unto you, let us go into the house of the Lord;" and, "more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools," you would "go from strength to strength," till by the services of the earthly, you should be qualified for the sublimer occupations and enjoyments of the heavenly Zion.

"Consider what has been said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things, and make you perfect in every good work to do his will: working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. *Amen.*"

SERMON VI.

ON HEARING THE WORD.

JAMES i. 21.

Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

THE blessed Jesus, "having loved his own, loved them to the end." Constituted "head over all things to the church," he not only spent, but sacrificed his life for the human kind. Nor did the effects of his benevolence terminate with the period of his ministry and sufferings on earth. He made permanent provision for the instruction, admonition, and encouragement of his followers in future ages. "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men; some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the

† Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Knowing our frame, and pitying our infirmities, he commissioned an order of men to explain and inculcate the principles of that "new and living way, which he had consecrated for us;" and frequently to call the attention of their brethren from the ensnaring objects, pursuits, and pleasures of time to the "one thing needful."

This is the origin and end of preaching; which has long and justly been reputed an efficacious mean of disseminating the knowledge, and exciting the practice of pure and undefiled religion. Hence the importance of an impartial and constant attendance on the publick ministrations of the gospel. That such attendance is designed in the exhortation to "receive with meekness the ingrafted word," none, who observes the connexion in which it stands, will dispute. It is an expressive metaphor, taken from a well known practice in agriculture; and requiring us to admit and cherish the truths dispensed from the oracles of God, as the [illegible]me of that "fruit unto holiness, the end of which is everlasting life."

We are taught then, first, the duty of hearing the word; secondly, the temper of

Amen."

mind, in which this duty is to be performed; and thirdly, its tendency to our improvement and salvation.

I. The apostle evidently supposes it previously understood and conceded, that all are bound to hear the word. Instead, therefore, of formally recommending the act, he gives directions for the faithful performance of the duty; and speaks in a style, which indicates a special reference to the practice of attending to the great truths of inspiration, as statedly dispensed in christian assemblies. The obligations to this practice appear,

1. From its divine institution. To any one, who but superficially surveys the history of our Saviour's life, it will be obvious, that he early sent forth persons ordained to that office, to preach the gospel of the kingdom.* That this was not a mere temporary expedient, adopted to introduce and give publicity to a new and unknown religion; but an arrangement designed to continue and operate through all succeeding time, is proved by the extent of the commission and promise, which he gave to his primitive ministers, after his resurrection from the dead: † "Go ye,

* See Matth. x. 1. and Luke x. 1.
† Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing the
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, a
of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to obser
all things, whatsoever I have commanded yo
And, lo, I am with you alway, even to t
end of the world." The same position
additionally confirmed by the subsequent co
duct of the apostles. One of their first offic
transactions, after the ascension of their ma
ter, was to fill the vacancy, occasioned by t
apostacy of Judas Iscariot ;* and, during li
they " ordained elders in every church"† th
was planted ; directing these elders, in the
turn, to " commit the same trust to faithf
men, who should be able to teach othe
also."‡

By these means, a succession of public
teachers has been preserved, and the christi
ministry may be traced to the express appoin
ment and command of Christ. In this vie
it unquestionably merits profound regard.
" the author and finisher of our faith" have r
quired some to preach, it is, of course, incun
bent on others to hear ; and gratitude, as we
as deference to him, who " died that w

* See Acts i. 16. ad fin. † Ibid. xiv. 23.
‡ 1 Tim. ii. 2.

might live," should prompt a cheerful compliance with the intimations of his will.

But 2. The duty of hearing the word rests not solely on the divine authority : It is both requisite and profitable for instruction.

A large proportion of our species have occasion for " some man to guide them," in their moral and religious concerns. Not to insist on the case of the young and inexperienced ; nor yet of those in riper age, whose advantages and capacity for improvement are circumscribed within narrow limits, and who confessedly " need one to teach them which be the first principles of the oracles of God," many of the intelligent and discerning are so constantly occupied by other cares and pursuits, as to have little time, and, perhaps, less inclination for theological inquiries. Though well informed in secular affairs, they may still be untaught in spiritual wisdom : For it is a fact, equally notorious and melancholy, that religion rarely, if ever, holds that rank among the objects of education, which its importance demands. In many instances it is totally neglected. May not persons, in this situation, be instructed from the pulpit ? To them, at least, it is an invaluable privilege, to have fre-

quent opportunities of hearing the scriptur publickly read, illustrated, and enforced. N is this privilege exclusively theirs. Men the greatest erudition and leisure may " be and increase learning."

The lawyer and physician, sometime give salutary counsel and assistance to thos who are as well acquainted with the gene principles of their respective professions themselves, and who, in other respects, a much their superiours. Why may not tl clergyman do the same? Have his appropria studies no tendency to qualify him for inform ing his brethren, however enlightened, who minds are habitually engrossed by other sul jects? Or is that economy of grace, " whic the angels desire to look into," so easily fat omed, as to preclude the necessity of applic tion? Far be it from me to magnify the dif culty of knowing " the truth as it is in Jesus. Yet, that clear, extensive, and combinin views of christianity should be obtained, witl out discipline and culture, is utterly inco ceivable. In quest of human science, besic the perusal of rudimental books, teachers a employed, and years are spent under their t ition. But what human science embraces many interesting objects and diversified re

tions, as the christian scheme of redemption? The method, which its glorious author has prescribed for its illustration, is perfectly analogous to that, in which every other species of knowledge is communicated and acquired. Where then shall we find the person, who is too wise to profit by the regular preaching of the gospel?

Say, however, if you please, that there are numbers, who "have more understanding than all their teachers." Still the obligation to hear remains in force. For we are, 3. to note, that to divulge new doctrines, and bring "strange things to the ear," is not the chief design of publick teaching. Impressions of piety and virtue may subside, and acknowledged truths fail of their proper influence on the heart and life, through forgetful inattention. To this the learned, as well as the ignorant, are liable. All, who profess and believe the bible, whether they know little or much of its contents, require a friendly monitor to direct their thoughts, and urge their obedience to the plainest injunctions. They may need frequent information; but they have uninterrupted calls for incitement. Whose theory, however incorrect, is less perfect than his practice?

Hence, it is an essential branch of ministerial duty to admonish and persuade. "Wherefore," says Peter, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance." In performing this duty, without supposing the existence, or display of pre-eminent talents, additional illustration may be given to the most familiar subjects; and the weight of motives, already felt and cherished, may be greatly increased. Who does not know that opinions and arguments, to which we are by no means insensible, become more interesting and operative by being presented and viewed in various lights? Besides, a preacher of ordinary genius and acquirements may incidentally suggest thoughts, which have hitherto escaped the notice of the most penetrating hearer, and which naturally lead to a long and useful train of reflexion, or impel to a more diligent and critical examination of the sacred pages. This is a more common and powerful incentive to reading, meditation, and watchfulness, than may be readily imagined. Let any one, in the habit of perusing and pondering the oracles

of heaven, examine the causes, which have facilitated and formed this habit, and he will find the publick ministrations of the gospel among the most effective. These have at once furnished him with materials for devout contemplation, referred him to the only infallible standard of truth and righteousness, and kept alive in his heart that deep sense of divine things, without which a disposition for religious inquiry and improvement could not subsist. Thus the noble Bereans of old, having "received the word with all readiness of mind, searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so; and therefore many of them believed."

You see then, that every class and description of society may derive personal advantage from the practice for which we contend. But were it otherwise; were any too learned to be taught, and too virtuous to be edified in this way, it would nevertheless be incumbent upon them, for the sake of others, to sanction an exercise so apparently necessary to the improvement and happiness of mankind in general: And were they to forsake the sanctuary, "the ways of Zion would mourn, because few came to her solemn feasts;" and, "through their

knowledge, weak brethren, for whom Ch
died, would perish."

Did people, whose learning, power,
wealth gives them an elevation and influe
above their neighbours, realize the incalcul
good or evil, which results to the world fr
their example in this respect; and the cor
quent responsibility of their stations, tl
would surely "walk in all the commandme
and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

II. Having now shown, that there
conclusive reasons for hearing the word, wh
apply to all the different circumstances
characters of men, let us, secondly, consi
the temper of mind, in which this duty is
performed.

"Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness
superfluity of naughtiness, and receive w
meekness the ingrafted word." "Filthin
and superfluity of naughtiness" stand oppo
to the "meekness" here enjoined, and im
the more gross and debasing acts of vi
These have a natural and powerful tendency
darken the understanding, and exclude
rays of divine truth from the heart. We
stinctively look with a jealous eye on the n
and measures, that counteract our favou
pursuits. This remark is verified in numb

less instances which fall within the compass of every one's observation; but in none, more visibly than in the treatment, which the gospel and its ministers are known to receive from the openly profane and profligate. Aware that the design of preaching is to rebuke and restrain their wandering steps, and "willing to justify themselves," they embrace every opportunity to depreciate both the office, and those who sustain it. Such is indisputably the origin of that indiscriminate ridicule, which is so often aimed at the clergy, not only in the vulgar haunts of licentiousness, where they are literally made "the song of drunkards;" but among certain others, who even claim the reputation of science and refinement. It is not the men, but the profession, which excites their rancorous hostility. "The god of this world hath blinded their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, should shine unto them." Whenever, therefore, they consent to hear the word, it is in the exercise of deep rooted prejudice against the lessons it inculcates. They studiously repel every doctrine and precept, which contravene their prevailing conduct. Their first inquiry is not,

"Cometh this forth from the Lord?" But, 'What is its aspect on our habitual temper 'and manners? Will it not convict us of ab- 'surdity and guilt? Will it not reduce us to 'one or the other of these alternatives; either 'to suffer disgrace, or to change our course of 'life; to pluck out a right eye; to cut off a 'right hand; and to take up our cross?'

If so, and so it actually is, self defence impels them to treat both the message and the messenger with neglect, at least, if not with indignation and contempt. They accordingly cherish animosity against all who "shun not to declare the whole counsel of God;" and whenever "the sins which most easily beset them" are described and denounced, they take immediate alarm, and not unfrequently complain of personal attacks from the pulpit. If they have too much penetration and prudence thus to publish their own shame, they will, in any event, evade the force of every prescription and command, by which their reformation is attempted. The subterfuges resorted to for this purpose are equally numerous and surprising. Sometimes the veil of pretended ignorance is assumed, and doubts are affected, where even a child would be at no *loss*: sometimes far-fetched and extravaga-

interpretations of scripture are adopted: sometimes a studied indifference and insensibility to moral excellence are displayed: and sometimes a shameless levity, sporting with the most sacred subjects, precludes every serious application to the heart.

Now it will be evident to every capacity, that a character, which necessarily generates such dispositions in the mind, and renders it impervious to the sentiments of religion and virtue, is a fatal obstruction to the meek reception of the "ingrafted word." Reason must be permitted to operate, before revelation can produce its desired effect. The dictates of natural conscience must be respected, before the voice of God will be heard with docility and reverence. A sense of the need, in which we stand of light and direction, and a concern to "know the things which belong to our peace," must, in the order of nature, precede, as well as accompany an acceptable and advantageous attendance on the means of religious instruction. "Keep thy foot, therefore, when thou goest into the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools." Not only "incline thine ear unto wisdom," but "apply thy heart to understanding." Renouncing those vices,

which pervert the judgment and affections, "receive the kingdom of God as a little child."

If we fix our attention on the end proposed in this duty, we cannot be ignorant of the manner, in which it is to be performed. This end is nothing less than our improvement and salvation. Surely, then, it becomes us to "give the most earnest heed to the things we hear, lest at any time we should let them slip." The gospel brings "glad tidings of great joy to all people:" and with what eager attention, with what fervent gratitude, with what reverential awe should they be welcomed to our ears and hearts! Yet how many, who would be absorbed by an idle tale, in which they had no concern, and from which they could derive no benefit, are alike unmoved and unengaged by the most solemn and interesting communications of heaven! A listless, drowsy languor appears in their whole deportment; and "what a weariness is it!" is repeated in every attitude and every gesture! Others, with a "superfluity of naughtiness," suffer their thoughts and eyes to wander to the ends of the earth, and are "almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." At the very moment, when addressed on the all-important subject of their eternal welfare, they

betray a wanton lightness of behaviour, totally inconsistent with every principle, both of piety and good manners. Is this an undue censure of the frequent whispers, and other sportive irregularities, which sometimes disturb and disgrace our holy convocations? The overtures of reconciliation from God to man are calculated neither to excite, nor to justify mirthful trifling. All who feel their weight will, of course, hearken to their demands with serious gravity. Not only their external deportment, but their hearts, will be in unison with the great design of this benevolent institution. Far from seeking opportunities to object and cavil; far from transferring the reproofs and expostulations of the gospel from themselves to others, they will listen to them with candour and self application, and make it their uniform endeavour to gain that information and encouragement, which may effectually convince them of their errours, and "guide them in the way everlasting."

It is not pretended, that meekness will require or induce you to repose an unlimited confidence in your instructers. "To the law, and to the testimony: If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is

no light in them." To this test you are bound to bring every sentiment, which claims the sanction of divine authority; and to "judge for yourselves what is right." Still, however, you may be much assisted by those who "labour among you and admonish you;" and, very special cases excepted, to forsake their ministrations would be no less injurious to yourselves, than disheartening to them. On this point, the advice of the well known and eminently pious Newton is peculiarly pertinent.* "A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is suited to his own case from a minister, who knows him, and expects to see him, than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially be not absent for the sake of gratifying your curiosity; to hear some new preacher, who, you have perhaps been told, is a very extraordinary man. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." Such unsettled hearers seldom thrive. They usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their

* This excellent advice may be seen at large in the works of John Newton, rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, London. Vol. I. p. 188—195. London edition of 1787.

ads filled with notions, acquire a dry, crit-
al, and censorious spirit, and are more intent
on disputing who is the best preacher, than
on obtaining benefit to themselves from what
ey hear. If you could find a man, indeed,
ho had a power in himself of dispensing a
essing to your soul, you might follow him
m place to place: But as the blessing is in
e Lord's hands, you will be more likely to
ceive it by waiting where his providence
s placed you, and where he has met with
u before.

"As it is our trial to live in a day, where-
so many contentions and winds of strange
ctrine abound, you will do well to watch
d pray, that you may not have itching ears,
clining you to hearken to novel and singular
inions, and the erroneous sentiments of men
unstable minds. In this way many have
en hurt, yea, many have been overthrown.
rror is like poison; the subtility, quick-
ss, and force of its operation is often amaz-
g. As we pray not to be led into tempta-
n, we should take care not to run into it
lfully. If the Lord has shown you what is
ht, it is not worth your while to know (if
u could know it) how many ways there are
being wrong.

"Prize the gospel liberty, which sets you free from the doctrines and commandments of men; but do not abuse it to the purposes of pride and self. There are hearers, who make themselves, and not the scriptures, the standard of their judgment. They attend, not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them the pulpit is the bar, at which the minister stands to take his trial; a bar, at which few escape censure from judges at once so severe and inconsistent. For as these censors are not all of a mind, and perhaps agree in nothing so much, as in the opinion they have of their own wisdom, it has often happened, that, in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned as a legalist and an antinomian! This is a hateful spirit, that breaks in upon the rights of private judgment, and makes a man an offender for a word. I pray God to preserve you from this spirit, which I fear is spreading, and infects us like a pestilence; and to guide you in all things."

III. But not to enlarge on the acceptable manner of hearing, let us proceed, thirdly, to remark its tendency to our improvement and salvation.

This head of discourse has been, in a measure anticipated, under the two preceding.

The same observations, which enforce and describe the duty, tend also to prove its salutary influence upon the human character and destiny. We cannot be insensible, that an institution calculated to enlighten, admonish, and excite us, on subjects "pertaining to life and godliness," bears a favourable aspect on our virtue and felicity; and if attended to, in a meek and docile frame, will contribute much to facilitate the work which is given us to do; and to qualify us for the favour, protection, and presence of our maker. Independent of a divine promise to support it, this conclusion is rendered probable by the nature of the case. But when we consider the practice, as an appointment of heaven, expressly intended for this purpose; and are unequivocally informed, that it "is able to save our souls," we no longer rest exclusively on the deductions of reason, but confide in the immutable veracity of Jehovah, and expect, from him, sufficient grace to give energy and success to the means, which his wisdom and goodness have ordained. Whatever indifference or contempt may be expressed by the world, our minds are satisfied with the assurance, that "it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching," (should

they even give it that reproachful appellation) "to save them that believe." Admitting the inspiration of scripture, no rational doubt can be entertained upon this topick. "Faith cometh by hearing." Men are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever: And this is the word, which by the gospel is preached unto you."

The natural, as well as gracious tendency of evangelical truth, thus ingrafted on the heart is to produce "the fruits of righteousness." It is not hearing in the abstract, but in connexion with its proper effects, which constitutes us "heirs of salvation." To come to the house of God, and "sit before him as his people," is no farther advantageous, than as it serves to stimulate exertions of obedience. "If," says the forecited author,* "if the twelve apostles were again upon earth, and you could hear them all, every week; yet if you were not attentive to the duties of the closet; if you did not allow yourself time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and if you did not likewise conscientiously attend to the concernments of your particular calling, and the discharge of your duties in relative life, I

* Newton, ut supra, p. 192.

should be more ready to blame your indiscretion, than to admire your zeal. No publick ordinances can make amends for the neglect of those duties, which, by the appointment and command of God, we owe to society." "Be ye," therefore, "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

To apply the subject, let us, 1. reflect on the privilege we enjoy in the means of religious edification.

Upon this point, hear the words of the great Addison.* "If to inform the understanding and regulate the will, is the most lasting and diffusive benefit, there will not be found so useful and excellent an institution, as that of the christian priesthood. That a numerous order of men should be consecrated to the study of the most sublime and beneficial truths, with a design to propagate them by their discourses and writings; to inform their fellow creatures of the being and attributes of the Deity; to possess their minds with the sense of a future state; and not only to explain the nature of every virtue and moral duty, but likewise to persuade mankind to the practice of them by the most powerful and

* In his "Evidences of the christian religion," p. 181—2. London edition, 1790.

engaging motives, is a thing so excellent and necessary to the well-being of the world, that nobody but a modern free thinker could have the forehead or folly to turn it into ridicule.

"How would the heart of Socrates or Tully have rejoiced, had they lived in a nation, where the law had made provision for philosophers to read lectures of morality and theology every seventh day, in several thousands of schools erected at the publick charge, throughout the whole country; at which lectures all ranks and sexes, without distinction, were obliged to be present for their general improvement? And what wretches would they think those, who should endeavour to defeat the purpose of so divine an institution?"

2. We infer the still more aggravated guilt and danger of those, "who turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. We are ambassadors from Christ," says the great apostle to the gentiles; and, "as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." Whether we consider the interesting nature, or the divine origin of the message, with which christian ministers are charged, it demands the profoundest attention. Shall the dread sovereign of the universe deign to concert mea-

sures, the sole object of which is to aid our progress in piety and virtue, and prepare us for admission to his blissful presence; and shall we dare to "set at nought his counsel?" Guard, I intreat you, against a disposition so ungrateful to your heavenly Father, and so injurious to your immortal souls. "Hear now, and attend unto wisdom, lest you mourn at the last, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me."

3. We are taught the true reason why so many are inattentive and averse to "the ingrafted word." They are "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Becoming "vain in their imaginations, their foolish hearts are darkened." The gross veil of impurity and licentiousness overspreads their minds, and excludes that celestial light, which beams forth from "the sun of righteousness," to illumine a benighted world. "Willingly ignorant" of the deformity of their character and the perils of their condition, they "speak peace to themselves, when there is no peace. Woe to them who are thus at ease in Zion!" Many are the obstacles which their own folly

has opposed to their conviction and amendment: Yet, difficult as the task is rendered, unless the fatal charm be broken; unless they rouse from their security, "cease to do evil, and learn to do well," their case is deplorable and hopeless beyond description.

Hence, 4. we are admonished to avoid the least approaches to habitual impiety and vice.

When once you neglect to shape your course by the pole star of holy writ, you know not to what inhospitable regions your feeble bark may be driven. One devious step insensibly paves the way for another, till the habit of transgression is formed, and an unreasonable hostility produced to the terms and means, which infinite wisdom has prescribed for the conversion and happiness of men; till the mild injunctions of heaven are viewed as a grievous burden, and the deluded votary of sin, regardless of the reproofs and expostulations both of God and man, "walks in the way of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes." Accustomed insensibility to the impressions of religion and restraints of conscience destroys the prospect, if not the possibility of salvation. Cherish, therefore, a cordial respect and veneration for christian duties and rites. *Contemplate* and attend the services of the

sanctuary with meekness and awe. Remember in whose name you are addressed; and let the importance of the subject solemnize your minds, and give an air of undissembled gravity and devotion to your whole deportment. Convinced of your spiritual wants, and intent on the benevolent end of hearing, "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

5. Let me remit you, in the last place, to "that great salvation," which is both the object and motive of the practice now recommended. Surrounded by temptations and snares, we need every assistance which reason and revelation furnish, to "keep us from falling," and excite us to "run with patience the race set before us. Here we have no continuing city. When a few days are come, we shall go the way, whence we shall not return." Death, however, is not the extinction of our being. We are candidates for eternity, and "must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." When that "day of the Lord shall come, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth with the works that are therein be burnt up, who shall be able to stand?"

What saith the judge? "Whoso heareth these sayings of mine, and d them, I will liken him to a wise man, w built his house on a rock: And the r descended, and the floods came, and the wi blew, and beat upon that house, and it not; for it was founded on a rock."

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hea

SERMON VII.

ON READING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures.

TO the serious mind it must be alike astonishing and painful to observe the heedless indifference, frequently, I had almost said commonly, betrayed toward "that great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." Multitudes, who read with avidity the current news of the day, and other publications, which relate exclusively to the affairs of the present world, find neither time nor inclination to inspect "the lively oracles of God." As if religion might be sufficiently understood without inquiry; or were less important in its nature, than earthly pursuits and gratifications, every source of human information, and even amusement is eagerly explored, whilst

those records of grace and truth, which bring "life and immortality to light," lie neglected and unimproved. To this origin may be traced no inconsiderable portion of that insensibility to divine things, by which the christian world is too generally characterized and disgraced.

That we may escape this prevalent corruption, and "know, in this our day, the things that belong to our peace," let us, under the direction of our Saviour's injunction, in the text, attend first, to the import; secondly, to the utility; and thirdly, to the obligation of searching the scriptures.

I. The language, in which the heavenly teacher has clothed this command, marks, with a precision peculiar to himself, the full extent of the duty in discussion. To "search the scriptures" is a phrase, which evidently implies something more than a hasty, desultory, or occasional inspection of their inspired contents. It conveys to every mind the idea of attentive, impartial, and frequent perusal; and inculcates, not only the external act, but the object and motive, by which this act is to be guided.

The scriptures give us a comprehensive view of the divine conduct and purposes, rela-

to the improvement and salvation of the
nan kind; and furnish a perfect and unerr-
rule for the government of our faith and
ctice. Systematick arrangement, however,
re especially in the doctrinal and preceptive
ts, both of the old and new testaments, is
e regarded. With instructive facts, essen-
truths and duties are interspersed. The
ıe subjects are exhibited in different con-
ions, and set before us in a variety of
its; that if overlooked or neglected in one
ance, they may seize and absorb the atten-
ı in another. Parallel passages variously
ress the same sentiments, or describe the
ıe events, to give additional force and clear-
s to one another. The dark and obscure
illustrated by the more perspicuous and
id.; the bold and figurative by the more
in and simple: and when both are equally
lligible and obvious, each is rendered more
ressive by the varied style and phraseology
the other. In connected arguments, many
tences occur, which, unless limited and
plained by the scope and design of the wri-
, will necessarily mislead the judgment, and
ierate errour. Precepts, which now meet
r eyes in the indefinite language of meta-
or, and seem to exact impossibilities, pres-

ently appear in a more literal dress, and thus qualified, are divested of all the obscurity which surrounded them at first sight, without losing any part of the superiour energy, with which they then struck the mind. On this page, we find a sublime description of the promised Messiah; on that, are detailed a series of transactions and facts, which evince its complete accomplishment in its time.

But if we would go on from first principles to the higher attainments of the divine life, a still more extensive knowledge of revealed truth must be sought. To collect, compare, and apply the numerous and weighty lessons which are scattered through the sacred volume; and, by this means, to give them their full effect upon our hearts and lives, diligent attention and research are apparently necessary. Not detached parts only, but the whole must be perused, and re-perused with care. Otherwise, though we may obtain what we know to be commonly possessed in christian countries, a general and indistinct acquaintance with the gracious economy, under which we are placed; yet, for want of more correct and deep impressions of "the truth as it is in Jesus," we shall be constantly liable to "make *ship*wreck of faith and a good conscience;"

to be seduced from "the way of peace" by the vicious propensities of our own hearts; and "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

As the best and only effectual security against these dangers, we are required to be much conversant with the scriptures; attentively to examine, digest, and combine the several parts of the system they contain, and "prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God." For this purpose all partiality and prejudice must be discarded, whilst the "law and the testimony" are uniformly consulted and cordially embraced, as the only infallible guide.

Content not yourselves, therefore, with a partial survey of the exhaustless treasures of wisdom, which are laid open to your view; but make "the testimonies of the Lord your delight and your counsellors." Appeal to them, in all cases, not only as the highest authority for your religious belief, but as "a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path." Suffer them always to speak their own meaning; nor let prepossession or vice pervert and obscure it. Engrave on your hearts their

useful instructions, and often read and contemplate the practical rules which they prescribe for the government of your intentions and actions. Then shall "your eyes be opened to behold wondrous things out of the divine law;" and whilst your apprehensions of truth are corrected and enlarged, your knowledge and love of duty shall be proportionably increased.

II. This, agreeably to the second division of the subject, calls our attention to the utility of searching the scriptures.

1. One salutary effect of this duty is the production and confirmation of faith in Christ. Its tendency to this effect is particularly specified in the words which succeed and enforce the command to which our thoughts are directed. "Search the scriptures; for they are they which testify of me." The prophets, under the Jewish dispensation, "at sundry times, and in diverse manners," foretold the advent and ministry of a glorious mediator between God and man. Each, in his turn, delineated some prominent feature of his character. One made mention of his genealogy, another of the time, and another of the place of his birth. This gave a general account of his life and actions; that descended to partic-

ulars, and brought into view the minute occurrences, which were to mark his earthly pilgrimage. Most of them described the circumstances and ends of his death; and several, at least, predicted his resurrection from the grave, and ascension to heaven.

The exact completion of these prophecies, in the person of our Lord, is clearly demonstrated by the gospel history. It is impossible to compare the one with the other, without perceiving a coincidence, adapted to force conviction upon every candid mind. The artless narrative of the evangelists necessarily remits the attentive reader to the anticipations of those "holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Whilst through a series of distant ages, he traces the progressive opening of a plan, early concerted for the redemption of a fallen world, till "the fulness of time was come," and the promised Saviour appeared, he is inspired with grateful wonder, and believes, beyond a doubt, that "this is indeed the Christ."

Beside the evidence derived from this source, "the works, which the Father gave him to finish, bear witness of him, that the Father hath sent him: For no man could do the miracles which he did, except God were

with him." To him, who is habitually conversant with his bible, these miracles, which occur in almost every page of the new testament, afford unequivocal and satisfactory proof of the divine original of the christian scheme. Nor is this all: The intrinsick excellence of the gospel code, the visible harmony of all its doctrines and laws, the unexampled purity of its morals, and the awful solemnity of its sanctions inspire him with the profoundest reverence for its gracious author; and constrain him to acknowledge, without hesitation or reserve, "that never man spake like this man." Weighed in this balance, the most elevated maxims of pagan philosophy are found essentially wanting; and the true and only cause of that "pre-eminence in all things," which is peculiar to Jesus of Nazareth, is seen and recognised in the divinity of his mission "to seek and save that which was lost."

2. A distinct and comprehensive knowledge of duty is also to be acquired by searching the scriptures.

On whatever page we fix our eyes, they are met by instructions and commands, which transcend the noblest discoveries of unassisted reason, and fill the mind with exalted conceptions of the improvement and glory, for which

man is formed. These instructions and commands are presented in so many different forms, each imparting illustration and enforcement to others, that the most ordinary capacity can hardly fail of imbibing just sentiments of the nature and design of his being. "The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple." Those, who pay but a superficial attention to them, are known to have more correct and consistent views of religion and virtue, than the best informed moralists of the heathen world could boast. Certainly then, they, who not satisfied with the vague and indefinite notions, obtained by a cursory perusal, "give themselves to reading;" and "meditate on these things," will not only "understand more than the ancients," but "grow daily in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Unlike others, who "err, not knowing the scriptures," they are furnished with adequate rules for the direction of their conduct, in every situation. When tempted to "turn aside to the right hand, or to the left," some appropriate injunction, or example of inspiration recurs to memory, with all the authority of a miraculous voice from heaven, saying, "this is

the way; walk ye in it. By reason of use, they have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Their perception of moral excellence is quick and penetrating; and they seldom hesitate in what manner they ought to choose and act. Not the abstract precept only, but its exemplification, in the detail of numerous transactions, with which it is blended; and by which its extent, when applied to actual life, is determined, "teach and lead them in a plain path."

3. The same means, by which the understanding is thus enlightened, tend also to sanctify the will and affections; and to excite a cheerful and unreserved submission to the authority of heaven.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:" It abounds with the most powerful incentives to piety and virtue; incentives, which, if duly understood and realized, would rouse the attention of the boldest transgressor, and impel him to "flee from the wrath to come." Thousands, who now "walk in the way of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes," without "considering that they do evil," might be reclaimed from vice and folly, would they be persuaded to *pause, and* "search the scriptures." There

they would learn, that "for all these things God will bring them into judgment;" that "he is of purer eye than to behold iniquity;" and will "by no means clear the guilty." There too, to encourage their repentance and amendment, they would meet with "exceeding great and precious promises" to the returning penitent; and whilst they traced the progress of others "from darkness to light," and explored the history of divine condescension and grace, in the overtures of reconciliation by Jesus Christ, they would discover the propriety and fitness of all his exactions, and be convinced that "his yoke is easy, and his burden light."

Such, to say the least, is the frequent result of the process now described. By this process, many in every age of the church, have "purified their souls," and been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Every established christian can testify, that for his first impressions of seriousness, he is greatly indebted to his bible, and that by its daily perusal and contemplation, he still continues to derive no inconsiderable part of that information and excitement, by

which he is led to "walk worthy the vocation wherewith he is called."

4. To these inestimable advantages, it may be added, that searching the scriptures tends to soothe the mind under the numerous disappointments, sufferings, and sorrows of life.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope." Here we are provided with cordials, suited to our condition, and adequate to our support, in the day of calamity; cordials, abundantly capable of administering relief to the aching heart, and composure to the agitated spirits. The tender mercy of our heavenly Father is displayed, not only in the animating assurances of sufficient grace to those who "cast their burdens on the Lord," but in the actual communication of this grace to many of his ancient afflicted servants. Here, moreover, is clearly revealed the benevolent design of divine chastisements; and here we are taught the practicability of transforming present pain to future pleasure, and momentary grief to immortal joy.

At once consoled and quickened by adverting to these promises, examples, and counsels, not only the glorious company of mar-

tyrs, but innumerable others, in stations too obscure to be known to fame, have "rejoiced in tribulation," and "reckoned the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in them." Contrasted to these benefits, how forlorn is the state of those, who, ignorant of the book of God, have no resource in adversity! Without one cheering word to direct their dubious steps, and enliven their dreary prospects, they fall a hopeless prey to sullen despondency, or passionate repinings!

III. May this contrast prepare our minds to attend, thirdly, to the obligation of searching the scriptures.

The light of nature "points out an hereafter, and intimates eternity to man." It has been the prevailing opinion in every period and region of the earth, not only that the soul is to exist beyond the grave, but is there to be rewarded or punished, "according to the deeds done in the body." This opinion being once conceded, it follows by fair deduction, that no temporal interest can be of equal moment with the welfare of our immortal part. It therefore becomes a question of the first concern to all, "what they shall do to be saved?"

Now the bible professes to solve this inquiry, and to "teach the way of God in truth." In every age of the church, not a few, who were second to none in talent, learning, and virtue, have studied and received it with a reverence, to which nothing short of a special revelation from heaven is entitled. Some respect is undeniably due to their decision and example; but still more to the inherent importance of the subject. This alone entitles it to a serious, deliberate, and unbiassed examination. I say then,

1. That though we even doubted the veracity of the scriptures, the same prudence, which is commonly practised, and always approved in other cases, would require us thoroughly to investigate their contents, and ascertain the grounds of their claim to our assent and obedience.

In other cases, when any thing is proposed and recommended, as tending to meliorate our condition, though it be the result of mere conjecture, and afford but a slender prospect of the desired effect, we bring it to the test of reason; and if the principle appear well founded, we scruple not to make experiment of its operation. And is religion only of such trifling consequence, as to be unworthy our atten-

tion? Is our everlasting happiness so much inferiour to the fleeting gratifications of the world, that we may innocently shut our eyes against whatever pretends to give us explicit directions for its attainment? If not, how can we justify the conduct of those, who reject and condemn the gospel unheard; who, instead of analyzing its instructions and proofs for themselves, repose a blind confidence in the sophistical representations of its rancorous enemies? ignorance has sometimes been said to be the mother of devotion; but the assertion is incorrect: Ignorance is the mother of infidelity. A great part of the boasted philosophers, who affect to despise christianity, are unacquainted with the evidence by which it is supported, and, literally, "speak evil of things which they understand not." Were this ignorance unavoidable, it might be excused; but since it evidently originates in choice, it cannot be guiltless. "This," therefore, "is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

To reason with persons of this description would be labour lost. Their passions, or rather their vices, dictate their creed. With them the primary question is not, "what is truth?" but what is accommodated to their favourite indulgencies and pursuits? Aware, that the word of God requires habitual purity of heart and life, and that the admission of its divine authority would fix upon them the charge of inconsistency and guilt, they are pre-determined to treat it in the same manner, as the ancient Jews did the baptism of John; and, at all hazards, to dispute its descent from heaven!

Were they not actuated by these criminal motives, could they be inattentive and indifferent to that holy book which is offered to their inspection? The blessings it promises are interesting, in the highest degree, to every individual of the human race. What can be more so, than the forgiveness, protection, and presence of Jehovah? "This is a consummation devoutly to be wished;" and wished it must be by every considerate mind, whatever uncertainty may be suspected or felt about the fact. Every considerate mind will, of course, be solicitous to "know of the doctrine, whether it be of God:" Nor will any intenseness of

study be thought too dear a purchase for so necessary a discovery. The bare probability, or even possibility of being assured on what terms salvation may be obtained, would render it our indispensable duty to "search the scriptures daily, whether these things are so?"

This, however, is not the light, in which the subject is beheld by us. We have neither cause nor pretext for unbelief. Few among us have any serious distrust of the truth and divinity of the gospel. The levity, with which it is so often treated by the unreflecting, is generally foreign to the real sentiments of their hearts. In the hour of retirement, especially when solemnized by some awakening event of providence, conscience severely reproves their presumptuous folly, and compels them to feel and acknowledge, that no other "door of hope" is open to mortals. This impression being repeatedly found in the most heedless and vicious minds, there can be no doubt of its existence in others: It is indeed generally professed and claimed.

Hence, 2. The obligation, for which we contend, receives additional enforcement.

We, my brethren, believe the scriptures to be the word, not of man, but of God; ad-

dressed to us, in common with the rest of our species; and designed to point out the dangers of our condition, and "lead us in the way everlasting." Are we not then bound by every consideration of gratitude, duty, and interest, diligently to "inquire concerning the words of this book?"

Were the civil power to issue a proclamation, on a compliance with the demands of which our lives, our liberty, or our property depended; or were an earthly benefactor to bequeath us an estate, on certain conditions to be performed by us, how eager would be our desires, and how indefatigable our endeavours to comprehend the meaning of every part? But what is a proclamation connected with the fleeting interests, or a bequest of the perishable possessions of time, when put in competition with the "glad tidings of great joy," which the gospel contains? Can any human lawgiver challenge a degree of deference to be compared to that which we owe to "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." Can any human testator have equal claims to our affectionate remembrance, with him, "who is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death for the redemption of transgressions, that were under

the first testament, they that are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance ?" What then is the language of neglecting those messages of grace, which announce " peace on earth and good will to men ?" Is it not virtually saying to the Almighty, " depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways ?" Is it not declaring of that Saviour, who is " exalted to give repentance and remission of sins," " we will not have this man to reign over us ?" " And thinkest thou this, O man," who art thus " willingly ignorant" of a subject, the unspeakable importance of which thy conscience and tongue recognize, " thinkest thou this, that thou shalt escape the righteous judgment of God ? Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : Out of thine own mouth will he judge thee."

To avoid this deplorable doom, let us " set our hearts to all the words," which the volume of holy writ " testifies among us, that we may learn to fear the Lord our God." Allege not the want of time for the purpose. This, however common, is a vain and groundless pretence. For to say nothing of persons in easy circumstances, who have abundant leisure for reading and meditation, and are therefore confessedly without excuse, if they

fail to improve in knowledge and purity, they, who are destined to daily labour, have sufficient opportunities to explore the oracles of heaven. None is so incessantly occupied by business, or perplexed by care, as not to have many intervals of repose, and even amusement. Now, if only a part of these intervals could be devoted to religious study, what a fund of information, relative to the dignity and glory of our nature, might be gained! What a variety of incentives to piety and virtue might be discovered, and called into action! Beside these ordinary occasions, which may and ought to be improved, every seventh day is graciously consecrated to the office of "seeking a right way for us and our little ones."

To all this may be added, that the scriptures are written in a style adapted to every capacity. It requires no uncommon intenseness of thought to understand all that is necessary for us to believe and practise. The great, and indeed the only essential, is a sincere desire to know and do the will of God. If with this qualification we open and peruse our bibles, when convenience will permit, we shall find no difficulty in imprinting on our minds those views of the divine character and counsels,

and those rules for the government of ourselves, which constitute the best security of our virtue and happiness. Let us, therefore, venerate the word of truth as the charter of our salvation, and we shall be at no loss for time to inspect its divine institutions, until they become familiar to our minds, and shed a benign influence upon the whole series of our intentions and actions; till no longer misled by indistinct conceptions of our duty and destination, we are "filled with spiritual understanding," and become "neither barren, nor unfruitful in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION.

EPHESIANS iv. 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

SPEECH holds a distinguished rank among the faculties of our nature. This is the medium of that social intercourse, whence result the most refined and rational pleasures of life. Were we denied the power of communicating our sentiments and wishes to each other; of dividing our joys and sorrows, in the reciprocation of friendship and sympathy, how cheerless and insipid would be our state! Alike ignorant of the discoveries and views of those around us, mutual confidence would be banished from the earth; and many sources of information and comfort, which now illumine our path, and gladden our hearts, would be inaccessible to mortals.

But the benefits of language are not confined to the present world. It bears an aspect on our future destiny, and is designed, by the benevolent author of our existence, to facilitate the knowledge and practice of the duties incumbent on us, as candidates for eternity. By this means, we are enabled to celebrate the wonders of creation, providence, and redemption; and to enkindle, both in ourselves and others, that love to God and man, which "is the fulfilling of the law." The sacred writers accordingly insist much on the due government of the tongue. David declares, "I am purposed, that my mouth shall not transgress;" James asserts, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body;" and, on the same principle, Paul exhorts, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Under the article of "corrupt communications," may be comprised, not only that indecent jesting, which pollutes the lips of the licentious, and those blasphemous imprecations, which heighten the depravity of the impious, but all other expressions and phrases, which counteract the holy simplicity of the gospel.

Every thing of this kind is forbidden; and a style of inoffensive discourse enjoined, tending, while it improves and confirms our own virtue, to conciliate the attention, and excite the activity of others.

The apostle pre-supposes, that conversation has a powerful influence in forming our character; and, on this ground, urges the importance of making it uniformly subservient to the purposes of religion and morality. A distinct consideration of these two particulars will give us possession of the useful instruction, conveyed in the text, and furnish those directions which, at once, encourage and assist obedience.

I. That conversation has a powerful influence in forming our character, must be apparent to every one, accustomed to observe the operations of his mind, or the progress of his actions. Thoughts, confined to our own bosoms, are seldom uniform and vigorous in their effects; but when imparted to others, and aided by discussion, they collect astonishing strength, and stimulate correspondent exertions. We consider ourselves bound to support and exemplify principles which we have once espoused, lest we should incur the imputation of absurdity. The act of divulg-

ing them gives us an interest in their reputation and success, to which we should otherwise be strangers. Besides, that which occupies our tongues and receives our applause, in company, naturally engrosses our meditations in retirement; and, thus rendered more familiar and agreeable, we at length feel ourselves no less disposed, than pledged, to conduct ourselves accordingly. At the same time, there is a re-action from the voice of concurrence, which inspires a zeal and alacrity, to be acquired in no other way; and contributes much to establish our opinions, and direct our pursuits. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Hence, sentiments, incidentally expressed at first, not unfrequently gain a complete ascendency over the mind, and give complexion to the whole character. It is no longer the impulse of a moment, which gives them utterance: They have imperceptibly conciliated the affections, and, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth now speaketh."

The preceding remarks apply indiscriminately to every species of conversation, whether virtuous or vicious. But to be more particular: The person, who gives indulgence to indecent levities of speech, puts his eternal

all at hazard. For a while, he may blush at the allusive filthiness which falls from his lips. Encouraged, however, by the approbation of dissolute companions, he soon mistakes obscenity for wit, and proceeds with increasing effrontery, till, by dwelling on images of impurity, "even his mind and conscience are defiled;" and he not only offends every chaste ear by his discourse, but, "being past feeling, gives himself over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

The person, who presumes to trifle with sacred things, though he begins with fear and trembling, gradually loses the restraints of religion, and becomes indifferent and averse to its duties. Nothing, indeed, which we are accustomed to make the subject or instrument of ridicule, can receive the homage of our hearts. Who will be improved by reading or hearing texts of scripture, which he has recently perverted from their original design to the purposes of merriment and witticism? The ludicrous assemblage of ideas, with which he has dared to blend them, spontaneously recurs to memory, and destroys their salutary effects. "Becoming vain in his imagination, his foolish heart is darkened." As if laughter and mirth were the end of his being, and

paramount to the most solemn obligations, both the injunctions of holy writ, and the counsels of pious friendship, are treated with habitual derision; and neither argument nor persuasion can arrest his serious attention. Alike insensible to the dictates of reason and scripture, he is "taken captive of the deceiver at his will," and heedlessly "treasures up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The person, who adopts the language of impiety and prophaneness, has commenced a career destructive of that veneration for the attributes and authority of Jehovah, which is the fundamental principle of religious obedience, and the only effectual defence against "presumptuous sins." Whilst he calls his maker to witness, on every trivial occasion, what security can he give for the truth of his testimony, even in a court of justice? And should passion or interest prompt, what could preserve him from absolute perjury? Whilst he unfeelingly imprecates the vengeance of heaven upon all who incur his displeasure, who can safely confide in his humanity? May not the same disposition, in the indulgence of which he so readily execrates his fellow-men, impel him to deeds of irreparable outrage?

Certain it is, that he has "no fear of God before his eyes," and is, therefore, accessible to every temptation.

The person, who falls into the degrading practice of calumny, necessarily contracts a malignity of temper and manners, equally hostile to the peace of society, and incompatible with that love which "worketh no ill to his neighbour." Between taking pleasure in the mortification and disturbance of those around us, and the actual commission of injustice, fraud, and falsehood, there is but a single step; a step by which thousands have plunged themselves into atrocious guilt, and precluded the prospect, if not the possibility of their amendment and salvation.

From the baneful influence of "corrupt communication," let us turn to "that which is good to the use of edifying." This, too, yields its appropriate fruits. To regulate our conversation by the gospel of Christ; and, not only to avoid those abuses of speech, which tend to strengthen the vicious propensities of our nature, but to embrace every favourable opportunity to introduce subjects, calculated to disclose the beauty of a holy life, will greatly assist our progress in the service of God. Even the negative virtue of abstaining from

defiling language, will serve to eradicate defiling imaginations from our hearts. Irregular passions are often inflamed by the agency of the tongue; which, when so employed, is indeed "a fire," as well as "a world of iniquity." Though not extinguished, their lawless rage is abated by silence. If, therefore, refusing so much as to name subjects, adapted to excite criminal emotions in the mind, we "consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works," the unholy flame of sinful desire will subside, and the purest affections be enkindled in our bosoms; affections, productive of continual improvements in piety and virtue. By pleading the cause of truth and righteousness, and endeavouring, "by sound doctrine to convince gainsayers," our own faith will be increased and confirmed. By "reproving the unfruitful works of darkness," and, in no case, "suffering sin upon a brother," our personal integrity will be guarded. We shall be constrained not to "allow ourselves in the thing which we condemn," in others. By taking "sweet counsel together," and dilating with mutual satisfaction, and harmonious agreement, on the wisdom and grace of the christian scheme, with the various obligations it infers, our apprehensions of the divine character and government will be enlarged,

our gratitude to God and Christ awakened, our perception of duty enlivened, and our attachment to "the things that are excellent" invigorated. By intermingling serious observations with our common discourse, and taking a devout notice of the numerous incidents and objects, which daily offer us moral instruction, an habitual sense of religion will be engraven on our hearts; and we shall be encouraged to act under the prevailing influence of its laws. Thus edified ourselves, we shall contribute, at the same time, to the edification of surrounding brethren: For, to adopt the words of another,* "in whatever we set ourselves to learn" or practise, "partnership, joint advice, mutual incitement, imitation, and emulation, if there be room for it, have unspeakable force."

II. Hence appears, secondly, the great importance of making our conversation uniformly conducive to the purposes of religion and morality.

As a science only, christianity claims profound attention, and may well employ our thoughts and tongues. It discloses a comprehensive, connected system of truth, compared to which, the brightest discoveries of reason and philosophy lose their lustre; and the ordinary themes of

* Archbishop Secker.

discourse appear totally insignificant. But when we consider its august design; the obligations it inculcates, the hopes it inspires, and the glory it brings to light, neither the duty, nor the utility of holding frequent converse on its doctrines and laws can be denied. To "talk of them, when we sit in the house, and when we walk by the way; when we lie down, and when we rise up," is not only becoming, but necessary to establish our faith, and excite our obedience.

We have already seen, that subjects, which we seldom or never mention to others, soon fall into oblivion. To this origin may be traced a great part of the ignorance and vice, which prevail in the world. Terrified by the apprehension of ridicule from the unreflecting, many are "ashamed of the gospel of Christ," and stifle in silence every serious impression. There are few, perhaps, even among the most profligate, who, at some period of their lives, have not had convictions, the explicit avowal of which might have banished seducers from their presence, and procured them such counsellors, as would have ensured their conversion.

By a criminal deficiency in this respect, even the virtuous too often fail of many improvements and comforts, to which they might otherwise attain. Neglecting the daily interchange of advice,

admonition, and reproof, they become indifferent in their feelings; their zeal insensibly abates; and though they may not "draw back to perdition," their progress in knowledge and holiness is hardly perceived.

In temporal affairs, we consult our friends, and express our opinions and wishes, without reserve. Nor is our labour lost. We, in most cases, obtain the information, assistance, and encouragement, which we seek. Often are our doubts removed, our fears diminished, our hopes revived, and our industry quickened, in the pursuits of this life, by the cheering voice of friendship. Do we need less support in quest of "the true riches," than in prosecution of the transient interests of time? Or is the welfare of the body more important than the salvation of the soul? Or have we greater cause to be ashamed of "that good part, which can never be taken away from us," than of our regard to the perishable possessions and enjoyments, which earth affords? Let not; for your consciences have already given a negative answer, why should we neglect the use of means, so visibly calculated to animate and embolden us to "run with patience the race set before us?" Were we to speak of spiritual things with the same unaffected freedom and alacrity with which we confer together on sublunary con

ras, not our improvement only, but our plea-
re would be perpetually increased by the fel-
wship of society. Each company would be-
ome a school of instruction, and whilst knowl-
dge and virtue were mutually cherished, mutual
omfort, hope, and joy would be the happy result.

Under the impression of this truth, it is equally
tonishing and painful to observe, with what in-
ifference, and even aversion, religion is com-
only treated. In many circles, otherwise full
f life and spirit, a serious remark, however nat-
rally interposed, produces an instantaneous
loom upon every countenance, and seals every
outh in the profoundest silence! With down-
ast looks of uneasiness, which an immodest in-
inuation, or a profane expression would hardly
ccasion, all studiously avoid reply, and wait,
ith manifest impatience, for a pretext to resume
he former topick, or introduce some other, de-
ached from the irksome thought of God and
uty! No sooner is this object gained, than vi-
acity brightens every face, and unlooses every
ongue! Restored to their accustomed and fa-
vourite element, they again unite in the loqua-
ious reciprocation of trifles, and seem to felici-
ate themselves in their deliverance from the in-
rusion of reflexions, which bring into view the
circumstances and end of their being!

Are such feelings and conduct consistent with the dignity of our reasonable nature? What more noble employment can be conceived, than to explore the character and will of our heavenly Father; "make mention of his loving-kindness, and talk of his wondrous works?"

Formed for immortality, and destined to a future state of retribution, religion is our highest glory, and ought to be our chief delight. Shall we then cherish aversion to its language, and imagine it unfriendly to our social enjoyment? Its tendency to purify and exalt the soul, if duly realized, would overcome this criminal aversion, and render us both solicitous and communicative, respecting "the things, which belong to our everlasting peace." Had we just apprehensions of the prize, for which we are called to contend, we should invariably direct our words, as well as actions to its attainment. Not that we are required to confine our conversation exclusively to religious subjects. "To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven." The business, cares, and interests of this life demand a portion of our attention; and of these we may innocently converse. Nor are we denied the relaxation, which the harmless excursions of wit, humour, and fancy afford. These, *on proper* occasions, and within proper limits, *may, at* once, enliven a social hour, and prepare

us for renewed alertness, activity, and zeal, in the service both of God and man. Every thing of the kind, however, must be subordinated to christian principles, and never suffered, either to counteract or preclude remarks, adapted to enlighten the understanding and improve the heart.

Here the directions, with which we proposed to conclude, invite our consideration.

1. The first step toward a conversation, tending to form us to the christian character, is to avoid all profane and indecent language. Surrounded by the gay and thoughtless, we are in frequent danger of falling into levities, inconsistent with that "sound speech, which cannot be condemned." When the spirits are exhilarated by scenes and subjects of mirth, our sympathy may rise to an undue degree, and betray us into those "idle words," which necessarily produce a temporary, if not a permanent disrelish for the sentiments of piety. Where is the person, who has never been thus surprised into transgression? Where is even the true disciple of Christ, who recollects no instance, in which, by unguarded compliances of this kind, he has "given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," and "pierced himself through with many sorrows?"

The most effectual method of escaping these excesses *would be*, to avoid all intercourse with

the licentious and vain; a method, which, to the extent of our power, we are bound to adopt. But complete adoption, however, is impracticable; "for then we must needs go out of the world." It, therefore, behoves us to resolve with David of old, to "keep our mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before us." When placed in situations, where prudence requires us to "hold our peace, even from good," it is especially incumbent on us to redouble our vigilance, lest we be tempted to the utterance of evil. Otherwise, though we may sometimes presume to borrow the style of seriousness, it will be to little purpose. Defiled and disgraced by "corrupt communication," our own hearts will be unsusceptible of virtuous impressions; and, far from "ministering grace to the hearers," we shall only provoke the imputation of hypocrisy. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." But by a steadfast adherence to the course, recommended in the text, we shall be induced, as opportunities present, to espouse the cause of truth. The influence of our conversation, whether we dilate on the doctrines or precepts of revelation, will be felt both by ourselves and others.

2. A second direction relates to the discreet *manner* of discharging this obligation.

"There is a pedantry in religion, as well as in knowledge, into which minds, that are thoroughly enlightened, will not be apt to fall. The affected use of technical terms upon scientifick subjects is generally considered as savouring more vanity than knowledge; yet some worthy people make it a matter of conscience to interlard their conversation with a sort of technical piety, which, by exciting disgust or ridicule, is productive of the worst effects." Neither the peculiar phraseology, nor the peculiar tenets of a favourite sect can be introduced, with advantage to the cause of practical christianity, except among inmates of the same communion, whose opinions and views exactly coincide. To others, they "minister questions, rather than godly edifying;" and, by irritating the passions, serve to destroy that "charity which is the bond of perfectness," and generate mutual distrust, animosity, and censure.

Nearly allied to this errour, and often found in the same person, is a disposition to insist much on our personal attainments and prospects. "True piety affects no unnecessary exposure; its voice is not heard in the street; it does not sound a trumpet before it; the left hand knows not what he right hand doth."

In the bosom of confidential friendship, to which our sincerity is previously known, we may safely and profitably repose the religious exercises of our own minds; but to communicate these, without regard to time, place, and company, would be highly improper. In our general commerce with mankind, it should be our principal endeavour to "abstain from all appearance of evil," and to "show, out of a good conversation, our works with meekness of wisdom." The various phenomena of nature, the conduct of divine providence, and the incidents of human life furnish topicks of perpetual instruction and incitement. To avail ourselves of these topicks, and apply them to our mutual edification, is the great object of christian converse. Seldom are we called to long and laboured discussions. Concise remarks, seasonably interposed, are more frequently needful; better adapted to the freedom of social interview, and more likely to meliorate the heart. "A sudden glance," says the pious Dr. Doddridge, "a sudden glance of thought towards God in the midst of the world, is often a great refreshment to the christian; and a sudden turn to something serious and spiritual in conversation, is frequently very edifying to others. It strikes the memory and the heart; and is, perhaps, as a nail fixed in a sure place, when many

solemn admonition, and many an elaborate sermon is lost."

3. This leads to a third direction, tending to illustrate the extent of christian conversation. We are apt to confine religion to periods and places, solemnly consecrated to its exercise; and to consider its duties, as distinct from the ordinary concerns of the world. There are persons, from whom better things might be expected, who seem to imagine it a kind of profanation to intermix serious observations with their common discourse, though, on special occasions, they discover no aversion to them. But can any substitute be offered for that daily sobriety of language, which the gospel requires? With whatever eloquence or zeal we may sometimes speak of God, if, among those with whom we are most intimately and frequently associated, we neglect to govern our tongues by the law of kindness, and devotion, "we are nothing." Here, our true character unfolds itself; and, here, our hearts are seen. Here too, or no where, the design of our creation must be answered.

Subjects, which interest our feelings, will, of course, attract our attention; and though we may not dwell upon them incessantly; yet when any occurrence or suggestion brings them into view, we are no longer silent; but speak our senti-

ments and wishes, without reserve. Cherishing a just sense of religion, let us treat it accordingly, and never be "ashamed of Christ and his words before men."

This duty is enforced by its tendency to our improvement in virtue and holiness; to which may be added, the more awful motive of a retribution to come. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

"Seeing we know these things before, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Rejecting every licentious thought and expression, let us, therefore, "exhort one another daily, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." Then shall be brought to pass the saying, recorded for our encouragement, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it: and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and thought on his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

[v. 2 or Nr. 4]
By. Samuel Kendall. D.D.

SERMON I.

REFLECTIONS ON MAN, AND ON THE DIVINE CONDUCT TOWARDS HIM.

PSALM viii. 4.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

"THE proper study of mankind is man." This subject merits the earliest attention; for, until we gain some just knowledge of ourselves, we shall be ignorant of our duty to God, and of our capacity, in any way, to honour and serve him. Besides, the character, usefulness, and happiness of every individual depend very much on an acquaintance with himself, and with the rank and situation he holds in the scale of being. Inattention to ourselves, and to the circumstances in which we are placed, will always expose us to errour, and may involve us in remediless evil.

In the morning of life, therefore, and through all its advancing periods, the study of man, of ourselves in particular, should occupy the mind. To call the thoughts of young people to this subject, and assist them in the examination of it, make the principal object of this discourse; which will be followed by several others, intended for the benefit of this class of the community.

As the powers of the youthful mind are brought into exercise and strengthened with growing years, they should be exerted to form correct ideas of the origin, nature, dignity, duty, and destination of man; of his actual condition and capacity, as a subject of moral government; of the relations he sustains, the obligations he is under, the hopes he may cherish, and of his accountability to the author of his existence.

The text presents two leading subjects of contemplation. First, man; secondly, the divine conduct towards him. By examining the former, you will become acquainted with yourselves; by meditating on the latter, you will more clearly perceive your duty to God.

First. "What is man?" This is an interesting *inquiry*; not as it relates to his physical so

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much, as to his moral character; to the organization of his body, as to his intellectual faculties; though in the structure of both he is "fearfully and wonderfully made." But, high in rank as man is disposed to consider himself, the psalmist intimates that, in comparison with other works of the creator, he is scarcely worthy the divine notice and care. The contemplation of the visible heavens, the moon and stars, led him to entertain humble thoughts of man, though made but "little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour." But, waving this thought for the present, let us attend to the inquiry before us.

Finding, my young friends, that you exist, and possess energies of body and mind, or capacities that may be applied to various purposes, an inquiry into the origin and design of your existence and powers ought deeply to engage your attention. Unconscious of any volition, or efficiency, in your own production, you must ascribe your existence and faculties, to some cause without yourselves. This cause you will perceive, from the wonderful organization of your bodies, and more wonderful constitution and endowments of your minds, must have acted with wisdom and design in forming

such creatures as yourselves; and therefore must be intelligent. Who, or what is this intelligent cause of your being and faculties, if it may be sought out, you will feel interested to learn, as soon as you are able to arrange your thoughts, and come to a conclusion on the subject. In this natural and very important inquiry you will never gain satisfaction, until you arrive at this point, viz. That there is an uncreated, self-existent, intelligent, and omnipotent Being, who, by his own underived wisdom and power, hath "formed the earth and the world," with all their inhabitants. This creator is God; and man is his creature; having received from him soul and body, with all their powers and faculties, and being dependent on him for the continuance of life and its comforts.

Fixed in this belief, his nature, rank, and dignity become a subject of investigation and contemplation. It appears from the best light afforded us, that man possesses an animal and spiritual, a sensitive and rational, a mortal and immortal nature. In his animal nature there is no very striking difference between him and other creatures that inhabit the earth; but his *intellectual* faculties, his perception, reason, re-

flection, understanding, and judgment give him a place among the intelligent offspring of the Deity. Whether he form the connecting link between superiour intelligences and irrational animals is immaterial. It is enough for us to know that God "made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour; made him to have dominion over the works of his hands," to be lord over this part of creation.

"There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding."

God "teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven." By exercising, and reflecting upon, the powers of your own minds, you will learn, that you bear the image of him that created you, that your reason emanated from the eternal fountain of intelligence. This natural conclusion is authorized by a divine testimony. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." This image of the Deity, which was originally stamped upon human nature, and which it still retains in some degree, did not consist wholly in moral rectitude; but partly in the rational faculties of the

mind. So far as moral rectitude, or perfect innocence, is an impression of the image of the creator on the creature, man has now no claim to the honour. Conscious that he is not in a state of perfect innocence, he must feel that, in this respect, he hath lost his dignity. Under the dominion, or corrupting influence, of sin, he bears no moral likeness to infinite purity and holiness. But, in his reason, or capacity of choosing and acting with design, and for some end, he yet exhibits a faint resemblance of underived wisdom and intelligence. In this view man holds a dignified rank among the creatures of God; and he may be reasonably required to pursue a course worthy of his nature and dignity, and pleasing to the author of his being.

What, then, is his duty, as a rational creature, capable of moral action? We wish our readers to enter most seriously into this inquiry. It is of vast importance. It deeply concerns you, my young friends; as an erroneous opinion, and wrong step, at the commencement of your mortal race, may involve you in consequences fatal to present peace, and to ultimate happiness.

If reason, or a capacity to discern the difference *between* good and evil, between that which

eable, and that which is opposed, to the nature and will of God, be a part of the and honour with which man is crowned, his duty to obey the voice of reason, to e and act agreeably to his knowledge of ifference between good and evil. When , or moral sense and discernment, fail to n his determinations and actions, he be- s an offender against God, and against the nder which he is placed; and loses the and honour, which distinguished him from ur creatures; or tarnishes their lustre, and des himself below the rank assigned him. intellectual faculties and moral powers ted from God, and were communicated e him an honourable elevation in the scale ing, and to fit him for higher service than creatures can perform, and purer enjoy- than they can receive, it must be his duty ploy them to the divine honour, for the hich God designed by enriching his soul such gifts. A correct knowledge of our- as the creatures of God, endued with ra- powers, and subjects of his government, give clear views and a deep sense of our to him. But other considerations than already suggested will make the matter

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more plain, and show, in a very strong light, that our happiness is intimately connected with the proper exercise and application of all our powers, and with the faithful improvement of every talent.

The destination of man is one. Though it should be admitted, that no certain conclusions on this point can be formed by ordinary minds and means from the light of nature; yet from this light only it appears highly probable that man is appointed to another state of existence. On this subject, however, our inquiries must be guided, principally by revelation. This confirms the conjectures which reason forms, and supports the opinion which reflecting persons have conceived from the light of nature, that the existence of human beings is not limited to the short term of the present life. The body, we know, is destined to dissolution and dust. This fact is verified in the history of all the past generations of men. They are gone down to the grave; and all the living expect to follow them. But, beyond death, what is decreed for man? Will he exist conscious of his being, and capable of either happiness, or misery? We say the light of nature, though it does not afford complete assurance to every mind, leads

the thinking part of mankind to believe the affirmative, and to conclude there must be another state of existence for our race. The author of our frame seems to have made this impression on the mind.

> " 'Tis the divinity that stirs within us;
> 'Tis heav'n itself that points out an hereafter,
> And intimates eternity to man."

This doctrine, inferred from natural principles, and agreeing with the strongest and most correct sentiments of the human mind, is attested by a voice from on high. It is revealed and taught by the word of God in the most explicit manner.

Will, then, our future state be affected by any thing we do in the present? Upon this point the holy scriptures, in perfect agreement with the suggestions of sober reason, are clear and decisive. They assure us, that we shall pass from this to a state of righteous retribution; in which we are to receive "according to the deeds done in the body." Man therefore, though at present clothed with mortality, and compassed with infirmities, is an heir of immortality, destined by his creator to pass through this world to scenes unknown, from

this state of probation to a state of just retribution, in which he will be rewarded, or punished, according to his works, or to his true temper and character.

Here, reader, pause——Meditate on the thoughts suggested. Contemplate thyself as a creature of God, "made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour," fitted for rational service and enjoyment, and appointed to a future judgment, to interminable existence, in another world, with a capacity for happiness or misery. Your origin, nature, faculties, dignity, and destination prove you to be a moral agent, and a proper subject of moral government. An acquaintance with your actual condition, capacity, and duty as such, is of the highest importance to yourself. Into this it is our fervent prayer that you may be led by the proper exercise of your own mind, and by the enlightening influences of the holy spirit.

That he might answer the original design of his creation, retain his primitive glory and honour, and enjoy the continued approbation and favour of his Maker; it was necessary for man to yield sinless obedience to the law under which he was placed by the wise and holy author of his existence. But is this the present

actual condition of man? If not, is he now able to regain his original standing as a subject of moral law and government? These queries, with their proper answers, will present a view, a picture of man, different from what we have been contemplating. By whatever means sin was introduced, the conscience of every person testifies, that his condition is not that of perfect innocence. We do not insist that you should examine and determine this point by any revealed law and rule. Let it be settled, if any choose, by the acknowledged and incontestable principles of natural religion. As these require of rational creatures undeviating rectitude, or obedience to the law under which they are placed, every human being will find he is not in a state of perfect innocence; but that he hath transgressed some known law of his maker, and is guilty in the view of his own conscience. He cannot, therefore, expect to stand acquitted before God on the ground of his own obedience and merit. By the light of his own mind he is convinced, and the divine word brings the conviction home to his conscience, that he is a fallen, sinful creature; or, which is the same thing, that he hath not perfectly obeyed the law of God, or followed the suggestions of his own

reason, which was given to be the director of his conduct. Apply this rule to every case, and all will be *concluded under sin.* Is not this, reader, your actual condition? Will you, will any one presume to say, that he never has offended against the law of his mind? against the light and dictates of his conscience? If not, all must plead guilty before God. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This conceded, another serious inquiry offers itself to the mind, viz.

Has man ability to recover himself, and to answer, in his own name and person, the just demands of a holy law?

Not to insist on that moral impotence, that want of disposition and inclination to holiness, which are said to be induced by a single act of disobedience; it is a given point, I believe, that creatures owing entire submission and obedience to their creator, can never make satisfaction, or reparation, for one transgression of his law; and, therefore, of themselves can never regain the forfeited favour of heaven. We add, if sin have subjected man to weakness, corrupted the springs of moral action, or, in any way, diminished his inclination and capacity for holy *exercises* and duties, his future obedience, should

his past transgressions be pardoned, would be less pure and perfect, than that which he at first owed to the author of his life, and of his faculties. His hope, then, as a fallen creature, or as one conscious of transgression, if he have any, must rest on the mercy of God for pardon, and on his gracious assistance in the performance of future duty.

In this view of his case, what hopes may he cherish? On what foundation can such hopes be raised and supported? To these natural and interesting questions, the gospel of Christ offers the only satisfactory answer. Though the hopes of nature are destroyed, yet the christian religion brings "life and immortality to light," presents to the eye of faith an all-sufficient Saviour, chosen and appointed of God to reconcile sinners to himself, reveals the purposes of divine wisdom, mercy, and grace, communicates all necessary instruction, and promises all needed assistance. By it "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the

power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." Man, therefore, in his present actual condition as a sinful creature, may cherish the hope of pardon, and of ultimate perfection and blessedness, *through the abundant mercy of God in Jesus Christ.*

From these views of him, it is evident, man sustains a relation to this and to another world, to beings and things on earth, to intelligent creatures of a higher order, and to the adorable author of his existence. Though he dwell here, and is connected with the inferiour inhabitants of this globe, he is allied to angels, and, when his present connection with sublunary things shall be dissolved, will pass into the society of those, who surround the throne of God, or of those, who, having rebelled, are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day."

From these relations correspondent obligations and duties naturally result. It is impossible to reflect upon them without perceiving that we are obliged, in the reason and fitness of things, to cultivate a disposition, and preserve a behaviour, towards those beings to whom we stand in relation, suited to their nature and just *claims,* and to our own rank and capacity. This

being conceded, we must be bound to observe some law and rule in our own temper and conduct, as well towards our fellow-men and inferiour creatures, as towards their and our creator. Descendants from one common father, and subjects of one Lord, there is a natural bond of union, or a relation, which demands our attention, and binds us to certain duties; the measure of which will be best determined by a proper regard to ourselves, and a correct idea of our own rights. Our first duty and highest obligations are to God. All others are subordinate; though the faithful discharge of every duty comes into the general notion of obedience to the divine law.

Originating from God, endued with a rational and immortal nature, "made a little lower than the angels," destined to a future state of retribution, placed under a dispensation of grace, cherishing the hope of endless felicity, sustaining a relation, not to the creatures of this lower world only, but to the higher orders of created intelligences, and to the underived source of being, the father of the universe; man must be an accountable subject of his government, and amenable to him for his behaviour, and for the improvement of all the talents he hath received.

By considering what man is, you will learn for what end he was created, and what constitutes his highest dignity. His origin, powers, and all the circumstances of his existence, show that he was made to render to his creator a reasonable service, to glorify him in body and spirit, and to be in all things obedient to his will. Conformity to this design is man's glory and happiness; departure from it his degradation and ruin. Therefore, reader, *know thyself.* This branch of knowledge, though least esteemed and cultivated, is of the first necessity. Without some attainments in it, thou wilt never understand thy duty, or interest; nor how to apply thy powers and faculties to any valuable purpose. But intimate acquaintance with thyself, with thy nature, capacity, condition, and destination, will enable thee to perceive, and incline thee to choose, the path marked out by thy creator; which leads to "glory, honour, and immortality." The powers thou possessest are talents given to be occupied, not hidden, buried, neglected, or misimproved. They fit thee for noble employments, and pure enjoyments; for the service of thy God, and for endless progression in moral refinement and happiness. Think, then, how thou oughtest to ap-

ply them, for what principal end they should be exerted. If communicated by the author and preserver of thy life, ought they not to be employed to his honour and glory, according to his apparent design? If they constitute the dignity of thy nature, and stamp upon thee the image of thy creator, by a misimprovement, or misapplication of them, thou wilt degrade thyself, and abuse the gifts of heaven. If thou perverted the wise and benevolent intentions of thy maker, thou wilt dishonour him, and destroy the foundation of thine own peace and happiness.

To preserve his rank in creation, and realize the good designed for him, every creature must act according to the law of his nature, and to the light he enjoys. Upon this principle a correct knowledge of thyself will show thee, reader, that thou art bound to "fear God, and keep his commandments;" to employ thy rational faculties and moral powers in his service; and that this is the only way to promote thine own real honour and felicity, or to answer the great end of thine existence. These conclusions and impressions will result from an attentive examination of thyself, or from the careful study of man. But they will become deeper, stronger,

and more effectual upon thy heart and life, by contemplating,

Secondly, The divine conduct towards men.

God is mindful of man, and visiteth the son of man. He makes our feeble race the charge of his providence. Like a kind parent, he bears us on his mind, and adapts his favours to our necessities; is ever attentive to our condition, and more ready than an earthly father to give good things to them that ask him.

Had it not been for his sustaining hand, his watchful and benignant eye, his guardian providence, you, my young friends, would never have possessed, as you do at this moment, the vigour and activity of youth. The vigilance and solicitude of the fondest parents could not have saved you from the grave, nor supplied your wants. Though you may have been unmindful of God, he hath been ever mindful of you. He is the preserver of men. You not only derived your being, powers, and faculties from him; but have been always dependent upon him for the preservation of life, always the objects of his kind attention, and partakers of his bounty.

Hath, then, the Lord of the universe, whom *angels* worship, and before whom archangels

veil their faces, condescended to notice man, and to visit him with tokens of parental tenderness? Hath he had respect to your condition, guarded your helpless infancy, and encompassed you in the arms of his providence to this very hour? These thoughts ought to affect your minds, to excite your admiration and gratitude, and prepare you to enter into the views and feelings of the devout psalmist, thus expressed. "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Contemplating the visible heavens, those stupendous works which declare the glory of God, and proclaim his wisdom and power; how diminutive man appears in comparison with them! The psalmist seems to express wonder, that he should be an object of the divine notice and care. But he magnifies the wisdom and condescending goodness of God, by intimating that, however inconsiderable he is in the comparison, the heavens were made, their orbs arranged, and their revolutions determined, with a view to the benefit and delight of man, who is "made a little lower than the angels," and to whom God hath given dominion over the inferiour creatures.

Though "fearfully and wonderfully made," man, even in his original dignity and perfection, was to be reckoned among the less stupendous and magnificent works of the creator. He exhibited no such strong marks of wisdom and power, as the heavens display to every eye. But being endued with reason, he was "crowned with glory and honour," constituted a moral agent, and a subject of moral government. As such, God is mindful of him, and visits him in a way suited to his nature, condition and character.

But, considering him in his present degraded and sinful state, with how much greater wonder we may exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" How great thy condescension, mercy, and goodness, that thou shouldest make so unworthy a creature the care of thy providence, the subject of thy grace, and the object of thy benevolence! God hath entertained thoughts of mercy concerning our fallen race, hath visited and redeemed us from the ruins of the apostacy, hath sent his Son into our world, to seek and save that which was lost, and through him is now giving us all things richly to enjoy. His providence is concerned

in our preservation, and in every thing that relates to our present or future happiness. His watchful eye is ever upon us; his hand holds and guides us; his bounty supplies our returning wants; and his power preserves our souls from death. Convinced of these truths, each will acknowledge with the psalmist. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down sitting, and mine uprising, thou understandest my thoughts afar of. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth

as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance, were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee." How sublime, how impressive is this description of the divine conduct towards man! Remember that wherever you are, whatever may be your employment, or your secret devices and practices, by night or by day, you are still with God. He beholds all that you do, and understands your thoughts afar off, long before you have conceived them. What an idea! A being of spotless purity, who hath formed and fashioned you, and who will *bring* you into judgment; compasseth your

path and your lying down, and is perfectly acquainted with all your ways! Every thought, word, and action, is open to his view, and by him approved, or condemned. Is this true? and can you realize the truth of it? What, then, ought to be your temper and conduct? Think soberly upon the subject, upon your own nature, condition, and destination, and upon the ways of God towards you, and you will find no difficulty in coming to a right conclusion in regard to what is your duty, and what will constitute your highest dignity and happiness. You will perceive that the author of your being hath formed and capacitated you for the exercises of religion, for the rational and refined pleasures of piety and virtue, and that you are under a natural and moral obligation so to employ all your powers and faculties, as to promote the glory, and secure the approbation of your maker and judge. This natural and just conclusion, to which you will be led by a proper acquaintance with yourselves, is strengthened by the consideration that God hath ever been your preserver, your kind almighty friend, your gracious redeemer, your bountiful benefactor. All the good you possess is from him, all you hope to receive must flow from the same source, or

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never be realized. Meditate on these truths, and apply them to your own hearts; and you will then make a right improvement of this discourse. You will learn that God made you to serve him, to obey his law, to perform the duties and enjoy the pleasures of religion and virtue. May a deep sense of these things be impressed on your youthful minds, and serve to fortify you against every temptation, and induce you to act worthy of your character as rational creatures, worthy of your rank in the scale of being, worthy of your high destination as the heirs of immortality. Never suffer yourselves, my young friends, to sink below the dignity of your nature, by prostituting the powers of your minds to vain and wicked purposes, or by yielding your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. Never relinquish the hopes set before you in the gospel of Christ. But, while you cherish a firm belief that God compasseth your path, and is acquainted with all your ways, live in time for eternity, in this world with a view to another. Be sober, be vigilant, and watch unto the end, and we will not cease to pray, that, in respect to pure religion and to every moral and social virtue, our sons may be as plants, grown up in their youth, and our

daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace, and adorned with all the graces which become women professing godliness; and that all may be consecrated to God as living temples, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom.

SERMON II.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE CREATOR IN YOUTH.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

THE wisdom of this advice requires no illustration. Attention to it, my young friends, is equally your duty, and your security. You owe it to God, and to yourselves. Neither sex nor circumstances in life, can free you from this obligation. Nor is it required of youth only, to be mindful of their creator. "Young men and maidens, old men and children; let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven."

The text, indeed, is an address to the young; and is therefore chosen for the theme of our

discourse to youth; who are called upon in their early years to be mindful of their creator. But what they are now commanded to do, has ever been the duty of those more advanced in age. The subject, then, though directly addressed and applied to youth, will admonish, instruct, or reprove, those of riper years, at whatever period of life. The method we shall pursue in discussing it, will be, To consider the general obligations to remember our creator; to shew what this implies; and to point out some particular reasons why this duty should be attended to in the days of youth.

I. The general obligations to remember our creator will be considered.

These obligations result from the nature, reason, and fitness of things. God is our creator, the former of our bodies, and the father of our spirits. From him we received our being, and all our powers and faculties. We are his workmanship, "fearfully and wonderfully made," and fitted for a rational service; which we are bound to render to him. As the creator had an unquestionable right to assign to every creature his rank in the scale of being, and to require of each the improvement of the powers he hath given it, according to his own good

pleasure, man must be subject to the same g
eral law, and obliged to employ his faculties
such manner, as shall be most for the div
glory. In whatever he does, in the exercis
all his powers, he is to have a regard to his c
ator, and be obedient to his will.

As God is the former of your bodies, y
must be bound to "yield your members as
struments of righteousness unto him." As
planted the ear, you are to hear the law from
mouth, listen to the declarations of his mi
and attend to the warnings, threatenings, a
promises of his word. If deaf to these, a
attentive to things that are vain, unprofitat
wicked, and profane; that corrupt the he
and draw its affections from God, you v
abuse his gift, by prostituting it to a purp
for which it was not designed.

As he formed the eye, that we may view
works, and discern his wisdom, power, a
goodness, we should turn it "away from
holding vanity," and fix it upon objects t
will raise our admiration, reverence, and l
of him, who created the heaven and the ea
and constituted the whole frame of natu
Looking through the wonderful variety of
ture's works, we shall perceive in them a bri

display of the perfections of their author, which may enkindle the spirit of devotion in the soul. As the eye is in some measure an index of the mind, so it is an avenue to the heart, through which external objects pass, and influence its affections. That these may be pure and holy, we must "make a covenant with our eyes" not to look upon things that will excite vile affections, and turn the heart from God. The power of vision is not given, that we may look covetously on the things of others, amuse ourselves with vanities, or mark any thing out as a prey to dishonest wishes; but to serve the necessary purposes of life, enable us to discover, and lead us to admire and adore, the perfections of the Deity. Mindful of him, and of the end for which he hath endowed us with our several faculties, we shall feel an obligation to employ each to his glory.

Furnished with the organs of speech, our tongues are not in such a sense our own, that we are at liberty to use them to the dishonour of him that formed them. They are given by the creator, that we may "speak of his righteousness, and of his praise all the day long." If this were the practice, as it is the duty, of all classes of people, a mighty and no less happy

change would be observable in the state of society, and of religion. But, in defiance of moral obligation, and of the common rules of decency, the contrary practice is extremely prevalent. How often, even in polite circles, and among persons of refinement in other respects, is the tongue employed in profaning the name, instead of speaking of the righteousness and celebrating the praises of God; in uttering falsehood and slander, seducing and injuring others! Duly sensible of their obligation to employ every faculty to the honour of their creator, men would avoid all manner of filthy communication which tends to debauch the mind, and corrupt good manners, and would speak the truth in their hearts.

The more noble any faculty is, the more dangerous is the abuse of it. The power of speech is justly ranked among the superiour gifts of God; but the tongue, when the use and design of it are perverted, becomes a powerful instrument to inflame carnal desires, rouse the worst passions of the heart, and to disturb the peace of society. The devout person, therefore, retaining God in his thoughts, will pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips." He considers every abuse,

or misapplication, of his members to be a violation of his obligation to that being, by whom they were fashioned, and in whose book they are all written. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service;" a service which you owe to him, reasonable in itself, and happy in its consequences.

If, then, our bodily organs are to be employed in subserviency to the divine glory, because God is the former of our bodies; as he is also the father of our spirits, our mental faculties and energies must be consecrated to him. Receiving the breath of life from God, man "became a living soul." This is his noblest part, most exalted in its powers, and capable of the most refined pleasure and enjoyment. By it he is allied to heaven, and is of the kindred of the upper world. Upon it the image of God was originally impressed; and, though defaced, is yet so far retained, as his intellectual faculties bear a resemblance to the Supreme Intelligence. Emanating from him, the soul should be mindful of its origin, and of its relation to its divine parent, that every faculty may be applied to the duties resulting from this relation. The human

soul is formed for intimate communion with God, for the enjoyment of its creator; and is debased when drawn from him by the lusts of the flesh, or the vanities of the world. Considering it an emanation from the father of spirits, capacitated for the pleasures of virtue and innocence, for the elevations of piety and devotion, how it must sink from its native dignity, to delight in sensuality, to employ its powers upon inventions of wickedness, and to make the world its hope, its God! Thus degraded in its temper, sentiments, affections, and views, it receives no real satisfaction from the objects of its desire. They are not suited to its nature, and can afford but little enjoyment. To be truly happy, it must rise to its native heaven in its views, and aspire after the nearest resemblance of its creator; not sink to the earth, and there seek its portion.

Among men, the well born, those who are of noble birth, are fond of reflecting upon their descent, and generally feel an obligation to refrain from every thing low and mean, and inconsistent with the supposed dignity of their family. If there be any propriety, any fitness, in such ambition, how much more proper is it that all, being the children of God by creation,

should keep in mind their high descent, and abstain from every thing unworthy their noble origin, and their relation to a being of infinite purity! Tracing their lineage up to this common father, all are born equal, and the little distinctions in the circumstances of their birth lose their importance. The son of a prince, the heir of a temporal crown, and the son of a peasant, destined to pursue the humbler walks of life, are children of the same father in heaven, heirs of the same dignity, and alike bound to prove their relation to God, and to another world, by despising the sins and follies of this, and obeying the ordinances of heaven.

The obligation to remember our creator is heightened by the consideration that he is the author, not of our existence only, but also of our well being, of our comforts and hopes. His constant visitation upholds our spirits. "In him we live, move, and have our being; his open hand satisfieth the desire of every living thing; all eyes wait on him, and he giveth them their meat in due season." Having formed the curious structure of the body, and implanted in it a rational and immortal spirit, he hath made provision to satisfy our animal desires, and for our rational pleasure and enjoyment; and is

daily loading us with benefits, and crowning our lives with loving kindness. In our preservation, and the supply of our wants, his providence is always concerned. Thus mindful of us, and daily visiting us with favour, how reasonable is it that we should keep our creator in grateful remembrance. A noble and generous mind feels its obligations to a benefactor, and conceives it the greatest baseness to be unmindful of him, and unthankful for his kindness. Apply this general sentiment, in the case before us, and ask if receiving the bounties of providence in rich abundance, your minds ought not to be led up to the giver of "every good and perfect gift." If God made you for the display of his glory, and to partake of the streams of his goodness, it must be wrong not to remember him, and your obligation to him. Contemplate the wisdom, power, and goodness, displayed in our formation, in the rank assigned us, in the faculties given us, in the provision for our happiness, in a superintending providence, and reason will discover, and the mind feel, a high obligation to remember our creator with grateful affections. But this conviction, this sentiment, will be more strongly impressed upon the heart, when we call into view the great mystery of

redemption by Jesus Christ. By prostituting his rational faculties and moral powers, man lost the image of God, became guilty in the eye of the divine law, and subject to its dreadful penalty. Thus fallen from his original dignity and glory, his hope was destroyed, and he had no power to deliver himself from the fatal consequences of his apostacy. But this "was a time of love, not that we loved God; but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." The plan of redemption is an astonishing exhibition of divine benevolence. God hath created man anew in Christ Jesus, begotten him again to a lively hope, opened the way for the recovery of his moral image, and to "glory, honour and immortality." In the gospel he hath published "good tidings of great joy to all people," and proclaimed his readiness to pardon our sins, and exalt us to a state of ineffable joy and felicity. The gracious purposes of redeeming love he is still carrying on by means suited to the nature and capacity of man, and to his own adorable wisdom and goodness.

Review the general grounds of obligation to remember your creator. Your life, bodily and mental faculties, preservation, comfort, enjoyment, and all your hopes and happiness for time and eternity spring from him. You are, therefore, bound by the most sacred ties to honour him with your bodies and spirits. The author of your existence hath a right to your devout homage, to the improvement of your faculties in his service. Creation, preservation, the gifts of nature, the blessings of providence, and the richer blessings of redeeming grace, all conspire to bring the human soul under a bond to employ its thoughts upon God, and to raise its affections and desires to him. Convinced of this we shall consider,

2. What remembering our creator implies.

Remembering, applied to a particular subject, often intends the actual performance of certain duties, or such a sense of obligation to perform them, as shall have an abiding influence upon our conduct. We are to remember the commandments of God, to do them: that is, to consider that they are binding upon us, and obey them. We are to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy;" that is, to consider

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livine institution of it, and attend to its sa-
duties. Much in the same sense we are
member our creator, and the duties we owe
im. We are to maintain such a constant
realizing apprehension of his being, perfec-
, and government, as shall inspire us with
for his character, confidence in his wisdom
goodness, and a disposition to yield univer-
bedience to his will. Any thing short of
is below the import and design of the text.
simple recollection that we are his creatures,
that God is our creator, can answer no bet-
urpose in promoting his glory, and secu-
our own happiness, than the faith of devils,
only believe and tremble. They who are
ffected with the perfections of the Deity,
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ice, and with his redeeming grace, so as to
their hearts and lives drawn into a confor-
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short of the spirit of the text. As this
ns a general duty, from the obligations of
h none are exempted, it may be proper to

be a little more particular, and notice some instances in which persons remember their creator according to the intent of the admonition.

1. It implies such unshaken faith in his existence, such clear and consistent ideas of his attributes, such strong persuasion of the rectitude of his government, and of the wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations, such a realizing apprehension of the amiableness, excellency, and perfection, of his character, that we are filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of him, and are not only disposed to worship, serve and obey him, but cheerfully to resign ourselves to his will, place our highest happiness in his approbation, and our strongest hopes in his mercy and faithfulness. In these views, feelings, and affections, our duty and interest are combined, piety and security connected. For "they who trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth forever. He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be

careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Suitably remembering our creator implies this trust, this hope in God, this resignation to him, and a confident expectation that he will, in his own way and time, fulfil his gracious promises.

2. Remembering our creator implies a reverence for the institutions of religion, and the sincere worship of him, according to his own appointment. Without these we shall practically cast contempt upon his authority, and violate the rules of his holy word. Our religious worship and service must have God for their object, and not be directed to any other. He challenges our homage as his special right. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." To do this sincerely, uprightness of heart and a conscientious regard to the instituted times and forms of worship are requisite. So far as his will is made known, *that* is to govern the temper of the heart, and to regulate the time and manner of our devotions. We have it in charge from him, to "remember the sabbath day,

to keep it holy;" and "not to forget the assembling of ourselves together." Here time and manner are expressly appointed; and he who disregards either, does not suitably remember his creator and reverence his authority.

Observing the appointed seasons, and the instituted forms, our worship of God must be suited to his character; must be rational, pure, and spiritual, regular, decent, and in order. We are not, at particular times and places, to be carried off in the blaze of misguided zeal, while we have little or no regard to the "weightier matters of the law;" but to maintain an habitual reverence for the object of our worship, and a constant desire to fulfil all righteousness. Since God requires a reasonable service, it will be no breach of charity to suppose some, like Nadab and Abihu, "offer strange fire before the Lord;" but more offer none at all. Neither of these entertain just ideas of the divine character, nor of their duty to God. They do not so remember their creator, as to be influenced in their conduct, or exercise the true spirit of devotion. They neither make him the object of their worship, nor his law and will the rule of it.

3. Remembering our creator implies also a conscientious regard and obedience to his whole will, however made known. Just conceptions of the being and perfections of God, of his government and law, and of our dependence and obligation, will teach us to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lust," to watch against every temptation, to allow no act of disobedience; but to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure," by unremitted attention to all the commands of God, whether they relate to our duty to him, ourselves, or fellow-men.

In fine, remembering our creator implies such habitual reflections upon his being and attributes, upon his character and government, upon his right, as the author of our existence, the preserver of our life, the source of our mercies, and the God of our salvation, to our devout homage and service, as shall incline our hearts to him, and engage us to seek his honour, and to trust our perfection and happiness to his mercy and goodness. It is the first principle of real religion, which operates upon the human mind, corrects the will, draws the affections to their proper object, directs the conduct

of life, and inspires the soul with a filial temper towards its father in heaven, with penitence, and with religious hope and gratitude.

We now pass to offer,

III. Some particular reasons to enforce upon youth the duty of remembering their creator. "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth."

To retain God in their thoughts is not the exclusive duty of the young. The obligation lies upon persons of every age. It results from his being their creator, preserver, and redeemer; from the apparent design of their creation, their powers, and faculties; from clear intimations of the divine will, and from a due regard to their own happiness. These considerations apply with equal force to all ages and classes of mankind.

But some special reasons may be offered, why the young should habituate themselves to remember their creator in the days of their youth. In the early periods of life the mind is most susceptible of deep and lasting impressions. These, according to their nature, whether good or bad, very generally form the character of the man, and determine his course. The eagerness and pliability of the youthful

mind, as well as the heat and impetuosity of youthful passions, expose the young to temptations not experienced in riper years, and render them more liable to be overcome. Habits are formed in youth, and take deep root. When reason is strengthened, and the natural ardour abated, it is found very difficult to correct, or change, the habits of early life. It is doubtful whether they are ever so eradicated, as not to have some influence upon the temper and conduct to the close of life. Impressions and habits come under the same general law, and conform to the same principles in human nature. Made and formed in youth, they are apt to accompany a person, in defiance of his reason and better judgment, through every succeeding period of his mortal existence. It is therefore of vast importance that serious impressions be made, and sober correct habits formed, while the heart is tender, the affections warm, and the mind active. If, in the days of youth, the mind be most easily affected, most ready to receive impressions of every kind; if these impressions lead to habits, and habits influence future conduct, and form the character; if such impressions and habits are most lasting and unconquerable; if juvenile years be most liable to

temptation and folly; then is the time to seek the restraints and aids of religion, to remember their creator, "to set the Lord always before their face," and consider that he "compasseth their path, their lying down and rising up, and is acquainted with all their ways."

Proper conceptions of the divine character, of our obligation to God, and relation to him, and of the duties resulting from our relation and dependence, are the foundation and spring of virtue and piety; but ignorance, or unmindfulness, of the creator, is an inlet to all the vices peculiar to youth; and which often load riper years with their baneful fruit.

The mind is prone to retain the bias, or inclination, it first receives.

"Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd."

On this principle in our nature is founded the sacred injunction upon parents, to *bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." If this be a reason and motive for parental attention to the infant mind, temper, and conduct; it is an equally forceable argument, that youth, who are become capable

of moral action, should learn that wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord, and habituate themselves to act in obedience to its dictates. If so happy as to have been trained to this from infancy, in remembering their creator, they will feel a lively gratitude to him for the pious care of their parents, to form their minds to an acquaintance with him, and with their duty. But if, as with many it is the unhappy case, they have received no early instruction from parents, or never been taught to know the Lord, or to realize their dependence upon him, and accountableness to him; still they are not excusable in choosing to "live as without God in the world." Some knowledge of his being, perfections, and government they must have acquired, notwithstanding their disadvantages, and therefore cannot be excused from the duty of remembering their creator in the days of their youth.

Under the law the first fruits of the field, of the flocks, and of the herds, were to be devoted to the Lord. And are not the first thoughts, affections, and services, of the rational soul to be employed to his glory, and consecrated to his honour? Is he not entitled to the dew of thy youth? to the earliest services and honours in

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thy power to render? Sentiments of filial duty may lead you to perceive what you owe to our universal parent. If bound to honour your father and mother, must you not much more be obliged to remember your creator, and be obedient to him?

The infant is not more dependent on its immediate parents for its preservation and support, than all human beings are upon their creator for the continuance of life, the bounties of providence, and blessings of grace. Nothing therefore can be more reasonable, than that your thoughts should be fixed upon him, and your hearts and lives governed by his law, since you are absolutely dependent upon him for all you possess, or hope to enjoy.

Should you pass the days of your youth unmindful of God, and regardless of his law, what restraint will be imposed upon your passions? What prevent your running into the excess of folly and wickedness? In justice God may withhold his restraining grace, and leave you to rush into the most reprehensible and reproachful sins; into crimes that will bring you to publick shame, and, possibly, subject you to the highest penalty of human laws. To the want of early piety, or of an early habit of fixing the

thoughts upon God, as a being who understands all our ways, and to whom we must give account, may be traced those crimes, which have marked with infamy, or brought to an untimely grave, many of your fellow beings.

Real and peculiar advantages result from early piety. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It gives dignity to youth, and extorts from the unprincipled some proof of the secret apprehension they have of superiour worth. This worth excites their envy, but their envy shews their consciousness of superiority in the object of it. In the hour of temptation nothing can afford so great security as habitual mindfulness of the creator. This guards against the most trying, by suggesting the thought, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Its effects are seen in the son of Jacob, sold by his envious brethren into Egypt. Assaulted in his youth by a powerful temptation, he resisted it with firmness, because his mind was fixed upon God and his law. The temporary effect of his virtue was unpleasant; but God overruled it for his advancement to power, honour, and dignity. In the course of a wise providence he was ex-

alted above his enemies; but his undissembled piety and virtue rendered him benignant and forgiving to those who had sought his life.

The proper remembrance of your creator in the days of youth will preserve you from a thousand snares, temptations, and sorrows, into which the thoughtless multitude are hurried, and by which they are often loaded with disgrace, or involved in ruin. But, if this evil were not to be apprehended from the neglect of so important a duty, an early acquaintance with religion, and habitual attention to the duties of it, will render its exercises delightful to the soul. As the youthful mind is most free from prejudice, and susceptible of good impressions, so the heart is like to be more firmly established in the principles and habits of piety and virtue by cultivating them in the morning of life; the fruit of which will be peace, hope, comfort, and joy in the various stages of your present existence, and their ultimate reward will be glory and blessedness in heaven. Be entreated, then, "in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning," to give to God "the dew of thy youth." Then you may hope he will satisfy you with life, and show *you his salvation*; that he will guide you with *his counsel*, and be your unchangeable portion.

SERMON III.

MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS TO EARLY PIETY.

PROVERBS viii. 17.

I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.

In the context wisdom is personified, and represented as addressing herself to the children of men. Our object is to invite the attention of all, of the young in particular, to the calls of wisdom, which are the calls of God, to a devout and holy life. "Doth not Wisdom cry? and Understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors; unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, un-

derstand wisdom; and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth, and wickedness is an abomination to my lips." Thus the wisdom, or word of God puts forth its voice, and challenges the reverence and attention of mankind. In every situation and condition it addresses the sons of men, and calls upon them to be wise, that is pious, virtuous, and holy.

By wisdom and understanding, as properties of men, are intended true religion. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." In loving God, Jesus Christ, and the religion he taught, men love wisdom itself; and possessing this holy temper, the wisdom of God shall dwell and delight in them. If they early seek and cultivate it, they have a promise of success. No reasonable grounds of apprehension that they shall fail exist. The Holy One, in the name and character of wisdom, says, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." All that is required of men in this passage, is early and sincere attention to the principles and *duties* of religion. To this they are encouraged

by God's gracious assurance that, on condition of their loving him, and seeking him early, they shall find him, and be objects of his love.

The truly religious are the truly wise. Religion is the wisdom to be sought, and is promised to those who seek it early. To impress the subject upon the minds of youth, and gain their consent to become wise and good, we shall state the reasonableness and importance of religion; and then show how necessary it is, and what encouragement is given them, to make it the object of their first attention and care.

I. We shall state the reasonableness and importance of religion.

By religion I intend that knowledge, fear, love, and reverence of God, and that faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel, which shall produce holy affections of heart, and the fruits of righteousness, or undissembled piety and goodness. Pure and undefiled religion is the service which rational creatures owe their creator. It requires us to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." In the general idea of religion many particular duties are included. Several forms of expression, such as faith, holiness, goodness, righteousness, godliness, im-

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ply the whole of religion. But general terms include all the particular branches of duty.

Were man innocent, his religion would consist in such affections and conduct towards God and his fellow beings, as should preserve him in this happy state. But, as he has become sinful, the religion suited to his present condition includes repentance. This necessarily belongs to the religion of every creature that has offended against God. By repentance we mean a conviction of sin, a deep and sincere sorrow for it, a renunciation of it, and a strong desire to be freed from its dominion and defilement. The religion of man, therefore, does not intend absolute, universal and perfect conformity to the law and will of God; but it must consist, in part, in pursuing the way he has pointed out to obtain pardon, and restoration to holiness and happiness. This way is "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," which shall so operate upon heart and life, as to bring the person to a conformity to the spirit and precepts of the gospel.

But, not to enlarge upon what religion is in all its particular duties, and as it relates to the subjects and object of it, we will only observe, that the seat of it is the heart, and that it means,

in general, a right temper and conduct towards God and man: such a faith, repentance, and holy obedience, as shall, according to the dispensation of grace, render man a fit object of the divine complacency.

The reasonableness and importance of such a religion are manifest. Can it be conceived that any thing is more reasonable in itself, or of greater importance to man, than that his temper and conduct should be right in respect to his maker, and fellow creatures? On this his own happiness depends. It is the only ground on which he can hope for the divine approbation, which he considers, if correct in his judgment, the highest felicity. "The favour of God is life, and his loving kindness better than life."

The light of nature teaches that rational creatures are required to love, fear, reverence, and obey their creator. This is a natural dictate of reason. No person in his senses will dispute this point. But the mission, office, and sufferings of the Saviour present the most affecting proof of the importance of religion. He appeared in the world to raise men to the knowledge and practice of it, and sealed its truth with his own blood. Called to the exercises of it by such a friend, who exemplified its duties, and *vindicated* its principles, it must appear a

reasonable and important duty to follow his steps. Besides, in religion nothing hard and unreasonable is to be found. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." There is nothing difficult, or discouraging, in true religion, to one that has a taste for it. But, were it otherwise, it would be a reasonable homage to the Creator, and of high importance to ourselves. It promotes his glory, is connected with our own present and future happiness, and communicates blessings to fellow mortals. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It has a benign influence upon external circumstances, and on the temper of the mind. It suppresses, or moderates, the turbulent passions, which often fill the soul with anguish and confusion, while it gives full scope to all the sweet, pure, and benevolent affections. It breathes peace, adds dignity to the human character, and leads up to the celestial paradise. God hath promised "eternal life to them, who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." On the other hand, he hath threatened "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul that doeth evil." In

such promises and threatenings all persons, whether old or young, are deeply concerned. If so, religion is of the highest importance. It is the *one thing needful.* As it reinstamps the divine image upon the soul, it constitutes the highest wisdom, and most substantial good, that man can possess on this side heaven. If, my young friends, you, in any good degree, realize the truth of what has been suggested, you are prepared to consider,

II. How necessary it is, and what encouragement is given you, to make religion the object of your first attention and care.

The reasonableness and importance of religion in general prove its claim to your regard; and your own personal concern in the effects it is to produce in time and eternity, teaches the necessity of early devoting yourselves to its study and practice. A wise and prudent person will attend to that first, and with the greatest diligence, which he believes to be most interesting and important to him. He is always esteemed unwise, who amuses himself with trifles, and neglects things of the greatest moment; on which, perhaps, his very life depends. This, as well as other considerations, ought to have weight in your minds. It should ever be a rule

with all men, to attend to that object first, from the neglect of which the greatest evil, or from the possession of which the highest good will result. Apply this rule to the case before you, and you will at once perceive that religion demands your first and principal care; and that, if you would act with prudence, in view of your mortal condition, it is necessary for you to devote yourselves to it without delay. Can any thing more deeply affect your happiness in this and in the world to come? The vain imagination of man gives importance to many other things; but his sober reason, his better judgment, places religion above every other concern, esteeming it the most momentous that ever employed the human mind. Indifference about it is folly; contempt of it, high presumption—desperate madness!

But, my young friends, early piety is proof of a sound mind, of a wise and understanding heart. It commands respect and confidence. Even the wicked are constrained to pay it some homage. If you consult your own consciences, you will find that you entertain a secret esteem and approbation of one of your young companions, who appears to be sober, pious and good. If you observe a change in one, who was des-

titute of religion and virtue, he at once rises in your estimation. Convinced that the change is real, you view him with a respect that he never before received from you. I appeal to your own hearts for the confirmation of these truths. Very few can resist the charms of religion and virtue in others so far, as not to feel a secret reverence for their character. Thoughtless youth, in this way, honour piety, while they refuse to let it adorn their own lives. They silently confess its moral beauty, and its necessity, while they take no care to possess it themselves. By your inward respect for the truly religious, you may see how necessary early piety is to your reputation, and to your own self-approbation. You would be thought wise and prudent; be pious and good, and you will be really so. If you are conscious that true religion in others commands your respect, you must perceive its importance, in this view, to yourselves. Make the experiment, and you will find that serious religion gives peace of mind, hope in God, trust in his providence, and submission to his will; that it enables you to bear the ills of life, refines the heart, exalts the soul, and prepares you for death, and a happy immortality beyond the grave.

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Besides, your early piety and virtue may have great influence upon the conduct and happiness of your fellow beings. Those with whom you converse may be affected, and inclined to imitate "your good conversation in Christ." Moved by your example, they too may become the obedient servants of the living God, and ever live with him. It may even affect aged sinners, who are tottering over the grave with all their guilt and pollution, and bring them to a sense of their folly and danger. If not, it will have some influence on your young companions, and, under God, may save them from ruin. It will give credit to religion, and dignity to your character; check the progress of vice, redound to the divine glory, and to your own felicity. To all the true friends of religion, "who live godly in Christ Jesus," it will afford joy, while it quickens them in duty, and renders their service more delightful. They will offer thanks to God on your account, and encourage you to persevere unto the end.

Your religious parents, in a particular manner, will be comforted by your early piety. It will give them the highest satisfaction, to see their "children walking in the truth." Their pious concern, their fervent prayers for you,

their labours and care, will be answered and rewarded, if you, in the morning of life, dedicate yourselves unto God, and "walk before him with a perfect heart." Filial duty, the debt you owe to parental tenderness, ought to influence you to choose wisdom's ways, and to follow her paths. You would not wound their hearts, who have been ready to impart every good to you, and are daily pleading that God would give you spiritual wisdom, and sanctify you to himself. Hearken then to the voice of wisdom, and go in the way of understanding.

But, if it hath been your unhappy lot not to have religious parents, still you may be a blessing to them, and means of their salvation. We will not suppose them so totally lost to a sense of real excellency, as to be grieved and offended with your piety and moral purity. This would be extreme depravity. They see the wisdom of your choice, and feel that their own folly is reproved in a way that can scarcely fail to affect their hearts, and excite a better temper. But whatever effect your piety and holy examples may have on such parents, you may learn from them the danger of delay to make religion your concern and first business. They, probably, at your age formed some resolutions,

that they would attend to it before this period of their life. But, dreadful to think! they are yet thoughtless. Should you follow their example, and resolve to be religious some time hence, what right have you to expect you shall keep the resolution better than they? Their failure admonishes you to improve the present season. "Behold, now is the accepted time, the day of salvation: Therefore harden not your hearts."

We add, the propagation of religion, and its influence on future ages depends much, under God, on the rising generation. It is, in a great measure with you, who compose this generation, to say whether religion shall have credit and influence with those who shall come after you. God, we believe, can and will support his cause; but you may be the instruments of its defence, or advancement. This is a thought which merits attention. Others crowd upon the mind.

The longer you defer it, the more difficult will it be to engage in earnest in the duties of religion. Habitual indifference to sacred truths, to spiritual and divine things, soon leads to "hardness of heart, and blindness of mind." The obstacles to a devout and holy life will

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increase with the years that are spent in vanity and wickedness. Accumulated guilt, and diminished sensibility, are the fruit of delay, and the symptoms of a person's being "dead in trespasses and sins." Fairly examined, every experiment that has been made will show the hazard of putting off the concerns of the soul and eternity to a supposed more convenient season; for it never arrives. Frequently do we hear persons lament, often in the language of deep despair, that they did not early attend to wisdom's voice, and give to God the dew of their youth; but never that they too soon became serious and good. Many a dying saint, after a long life of eminent piety, has received consolation from the reflection that he devoted himself to God and religion in his youth. "Lay up in store," my young friends, this "good foundation against the time to come."

As a farther inducement to it, consider your dependence on the divine assistance, and the intimation that it shall be withholden from them who quench and grieve the holy spirit. The declaration of the Most High is, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." Concerning you, if the present season is suffered to pass unimproved, God may say, as of a tribe in

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Israel, "Ephraim is joined unto idols, let him alone." He who worketh in men to will and to do of his good pleasure, calls upon them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and gives every encouragement to their sincere endeavours to effect the all-important object. How kind, condescending, and gracious are his assurances! "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me. Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally." Can you wish for greater encouragement to early piety? or for stronger proof that the dew of youth is an acceptable sacrifice to God? But, remember it is given to-day, if you will hear his voice; to-morrow the glad tidings may not meet your ear. If you now refuse to hear and obey, God may resis you as despisers of his goodness. Or, if you should obtain pardon, you may be denied the comforts of religion. In whatever light you contemplate the subject, the present is the best and may be the only time allotted you for the great work of religion.

To impress this thought, let me remind you, that future time and opportunity are uncertain

to you, and beyond your control. If it could be supposed you would not become worse by delay, nor the work of religion more difficult for you; yet death may close the scene, and hurry your souls into the immediate presence of God! Many younger than you, perhaps your companions, have been suddenly arrested. This may be your lot. What foolish and dangerous presumption, then, to suspend your eternal hopes and happiness on the continuance of this uncertain life! to put off your highest concerns to a future period, which you may never see!

These are solemn and weighty considerations. More might be suggested; but I will only hint, that early piety will be attended with peculiar pleasure and satisfaction; that it will minister comfort in all your afflictions, be the solace of your declining years, arm you against the fears of death, and inspire you with a hope that will be "as an anchor to your souls," and "that will never make you ashamed."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. What hath been said about the reasonableness and importance of religion applies to all ages and classes of people. They who have not attended to it have the highest reason to confess

ıd lament their folly. The consequence of it s greatly to be dreaded. Has the world engrossed their thoughts, and been their only hope and portion? Wretched mortals! Their hope will soon perish, and their portion be with hypocrites and unbelievers. If there remain but a few hours of feeble life, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But, if resolved to continue in his impiety, let him relinquish all hope of heaven, and reconcile himself to the thought of an everlasting separation from God, and all holy beings in the future state.

They who have made religion their choice, Christ their hope, and his gospel the rule of life, have "chosen that good part which shall never be taken away." Let them go on rejoicing, grow in grace, and endure unto the end; "for their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." But,

2. The subject offers motives and encouragements to early piety; and is to be applied in a more particular manner, to young people. *The* reasonableness and importance of religi

in general, and the necessity of making it an object of your first and most careful attention, you have heard stated. Suffer me, then, my friends, to ask if you do not feel a conviction, that it is your greatest interest, and will be your highest wisdom, immediately to devote yourselves to God in all the duties of piety and virtue? Appeal to your conscience, consult your inward feelings, your rational sense of things. These, I am persuaded, will decide in favour of the most speedy and sober attention to religion. Can it be, then, that you should find in your hearts any reluctance to enter upon the important work, on which your hopes for time and eternity depend? What are your objections? Do you fear you shall seek in vain? You can promise yourselves no greater success at a future period; and do you relinquish the idea of becoming holy and happy? Surely not. You intend to be, at some future time, what we would persuade you now to be, that is, sober minded, pious, virtuous, and good. Your apprehensions of want of success in applying yourselves to the study and practice of religion, has no effect on your determination what you will do in future. It cannot, therefore, be the reason of present neglect. Besides, God has in

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his word given you all the encouragement tha can be reasonably desired. He hath never saic to any "Seek ye me in vain;" but hath de clared that those who seek him early shall fin him. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, an ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened un to you." What greater encouragement to earl piety can you wish? God commands you t "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and t learn heavenly wisdom; and can you expect t be holy and happy without any efforts or con cern? This would be contrary to your own na ture, and to the purposes of divine wisdom.

If, then, you must seek, or not enjoy the ob ject, why not at the present time, while yo possess vigour and activity, and are under ad vantages that will never be experienced in an other period of your life? Will any say i heart, "it is true, religion is reasonable and im portant; but I am too young to tie myself dow to the rules of a holy life?" What, too youn to serve the God that made you, to honour th Saviour that redeemed you, to act well, to b wise and happy! God ordaineth praise to hin self out of the mouth of babes and sucklings and will you think yourselves too young to glo rify him? It is a reflection upon your own un-

derstanding. You cannot be too young to be virtuous and good; but you may soon become too old in sin to leave any reasonable hope that you will ever be delivered from its dominion and punishment.

Are any restrained from following the convictions of their conscience, from being pious and good, by an apprehension that they shall be the subjects of ridicule if they do not "follow the multitude to do evil?" Will any own that such an inferiour motive induces them to hazard their eternal interest? He must make a silly, a despicable figure, who is laughed out of his life, or estate; how much more so he that dares not be virtuous and religious, wise and good, lest fools should mock and ridicule him! This "fear of man bringeth a snare." It is astonishing that any should be under its controling influence. Where is their fear of God? Where their love to their own souls? "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

But, my youthful friends, do you feel that you cannot relinquish your pleasures and prospects in the world, to secure the future rewards of piety and virtue? Do you mentally say, that, when you shall have done with the pleasures and vanities of youth, you will attend to relig-

ion; but at present we must be excused? The import of this is, that you will devote yourselves to God and religion, when you can no longer be active and vigorous in your opposition to both. What folly! What presumption! What high and daring provocation! Can it be imagined that God will be pleased with the efforts of impaired reason, with the affections of a heart that renounces its love of sin only because it does not receive its wonted pleasure from it, with the services of an enfeebled body, or of decrepit age? Will you love him least, and serve him last, whom you ought to love most, and serve first? Is this a suitable return for the divine goodness, for redeeming love? Your consciences give the proper answer.

The loss of your relish for sinful indulgences, or the want of vigour to pursue the paths of vice, will not capacitate you for the duties and satisfactions of religion. Besides, it is an unreasonable prejudice against religion, if you think it will deprive you of any of the rational pleasures and comforts of this life. It only restrains you from hurtful lusts, from injurious practices. It teaches you how to use the world, and not abuse it; and in all things to honour

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God, and preserve the purity of your own character.

Allowing all this to be true, some may feel that they are too much engaged in other concerns to attend to religion at present, and imagine they shall find a more convenient season. Yielding to such suggestions has proved the ruin of countless millions. Say not "to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant; for you know not what a day may bring forth." The present may be your last on earth; if it should not, you have no time to idle away; you are required to improve the whole term allotted you in the service of God and of your generation.

But take into view another consideration. Many of you have been, by the pious act of your parents, given up to God in baptism, and had the initiating seal of the covenant fixed upon you. Ought you not to ratify their act by personal consecration of yourselves to God, and keeping his commandments? Will you renounce your interest in covenant privileges, by refusing to comply with the terms of the covenant? Does your baptism lay you under no obligation to be pious and holy? As it gives you a title to some privileges, it must impose some duties. Your

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names are enrolled under Christ, among the children of the covenant; and will you desert his cause, and deny your name as christians? Meditate upon this subject, and you will find that your souls are, in some sense, brought under a bond to make religion your personal concern, and to honour your Lord and Saviour, by observing all his institutions, by commemorating his death, according to his appointment.

If those who have not received the initiating seal of the covenant would be disciples of Christ, and belong to his visible kingdom, they must *believe and be baptized.* By refusing to submit to this ordinance, they deny Christ before men; and will he own them before his Father and the holy angels? He hath declared that he will not. Think, my friends, on your case, and learn what is your duty. I would not encourage an inconsiderate offer of yourselves as subjects of baptism; but if, upon serious reflection, you have a desire to come, I would say, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." May you have faith and a pure conscience; and may holy ordinances be your delight and consolation.

May I be indulged a few words to those, who have formed the tender conjugal connec-

tion, and thus become heads of families? What resolution more proper for you to take than this, that, "as for you and your houses, you will serve the Lord." Unless you do this in practice, you may be chargeable with the murder of your offspring, not of their bodies, but souls. How often have children been destroyed by the evil examples of parents! Heart-rending reflection! enough to fill the soul with the deepest anguish! Imagine yourselves arraigned at "the judgment seat of Christ," and that you hear your children testify, that you never dedicated them to God, never instructed them in the principles and duties of religion, never taught them to remember and honour their creator, but to their irregular propensities added the force of corrupt examples, and instilled into their tender minds the most licentious sentiments; and thus led into perdition those whom you were instruments of bringing into life! With what horrour we contemplate the deed, when a mother, to conceal her own shame, puts a speedy period to the life of her illegitimate offspring! But are they less cruel and unnatural, who destroy the souls of their children by wicked examples and instruction, or by the neglect of parental duty? Think what may be the effect

of your own want of piety and virtue upon them who are yet to be born.

On the other hand, your own piety, instruction, and holy examples may be means of bringing your children to glory, and causing them to rise up in the day of judgment, and call you blessed. How different the end! The means are as different. Pray do not give your unborn children, or those that are now objects of your affection, occasion to upbraid you with impiety, and with being the instruments of their ruin; but, as they may be given to you, strive to lead them to glory, honour, and immortality.

What has now been addressed to young heads of families is not to be construed into an intimation, that religion may be deferred to such period and connection in life. It should engage the first thoughts, the earliest attention. To early seeking, success is promised. But how, it may be asked, are we to seek? I answer, by breaking off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord; by ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well; by setting the Lord always before your face; by the exercise of faith, repentance, and watchfulness; by humiliation, prayer, and supplication; by exerting all your powers to avoid sin, and

to honour God and keep his commandments, imploring his gracious assistance in every duty, and his acceptance through the mediator. "Pray without ceasing. Quench not the spirit." Be sober, and acquaint yourselves with the holy scriptures, "which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus." And may your hearts be established with grace. May the Lord be your God, and you a seed to serve him, that shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation; who shall come and declare his righteousness to them that are yet to be born, that, in the ages to come, his name may be exalted and adored on earth.

AMEN.

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SERMON IV.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

PROVERBS xii. 26.

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

An aspiring disposition is common to man. The youthful mind feels its influence; nor does it cease to operate in the decline of life. Few can be found, who have no desire to be esteemed more excellent than their neighbours. This disposition, though it often prompts to measures which defeat their own end, may be rendered subservient to the great purposes of religion and virtue. To effect this object there must be just conceptions of the means by which the human character may rise, not only to comparative, but to real excellence. *Did* men clearly understand in what this con-

sists, and follow the dictates of their reason, they would possess true worth and dignity; which always merit, and in general command, respect and esteem. Those principles in human nature, which distinguish man from every other creature on earth, induce him to seek with ardour whatever he perceives will give him superiour excellence, and gratify his strongest desires. To these principles, or to the known disposition and feelings of the heart, the text may be addressed in hope of success with youth, in whom we wish to excite a noble emulation to excel in every virtue.

Who are the most excellent among mankind the word of God informs us; and sober reason approves of its decision. The righteous have a fair title to the honourable distinction. By the righteous we understand persons of religion and moral goodness, who observe, with a pure conscience, the duties they owe to their Creator, to themselves, and to their fellow creatures. By their neighbour the opposite character, that is, the wicked, is intended. Righteousness, in the most extensive signification, includes the whole religious and moral duty of man. In this sense it dignifies the person in whom it is found, and gives him a vast superiority over

those who are destitute of it. Did men perceive how consonant the genuine spirit of religion is to the best feelings and principles of our nature, and how much it adds to their dignity and happiness, little need be said to recommend it to their choice and attention. But, in view of the actual state of religion in the world, we conclude mankind have fallen into gross mistakes about its nature and tendency, or conceived unreasonable prejudices against it; "since it is so natural to us to love that which is good, and delight in that which is amiable, when things are not misrepresented."

No one thing has been more grossly misrepresented, and its natural features more distorted, than genuine religion. Painted in false colours, presented to the mind under the most hideous forms, it is rendered disgusting in appearance, or corrupting in its influence upon those who embrace it as described. The enemies of true religion would persuade you to believe that it is fit only for weak and vulgar minds, for mean and sordid souls, that it proceeds from cowardly and superstitious fear, depresses the mind, and renders it incapable of high and aspiring thoughts. Thus viewed and contemplated, it *is not* strange that it excites aversion, that

many pour contempt upon it, and commend those, who are so free from what they call vulgar prejudices as to feel none of its restraints, but can, without any apparent checks of conscience, make it the subject of their unhallowed wit, and profane mockery.

With a view to correct, or guard against, the mistake of those who entertain such notions of true religion, who conceive it to be inconsistent with the dignity and happiness of human beings; and with a design to recommend it to all who would possess real excellence, we have chosen the words just read, as the theme of our discourse. They contain a simple proposition, which is easily comprehended. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." That this truth may have a practical influence, in a particular manner upon the minds and hearts of youth, we shall attempt to describe some of the excellencies of the righteous. Though we should not do it to the best advantage, it is hoped so many of his qualities and interests may be represented, as will convince every reasonable person of the truth of the text, and excite a spirit of emulation.

If any honour be derived from birth and extraction, the righteous have the fairest title to it.

They are born of God, and acknowledged as his spiritual children. Religion gives that feature and complexion to their character, which prove their relation to the family in heaven. Holiness is a celestial seed. They in whom it is planted, and who bring forth its fruits, are entitled to the most honourable distinctions. They are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." These are not high-sounding, empty titles, invented to amuse and attract a giddy multitude; they convey an important sense, are applicable to all the righteous, and intimate their present worth and dignity, and their future inheritance. By holiness men become "partakers of the divine nature," and heirs of an immortal crown. The righteous bear the image, and possess, in a degree, the qualities of their heavenly parent. These give them a real excellence and splendour, never possessed by those destitute of religion, however elevated their stations, or loaded with worldly honours. Having imbibed the spirit of religion, the righteous person constantly acts under its influence, and aspires to the nearest resemblance of the adorable object of his love and reverence. He never, with design, behaves in a manner unworthy of his origin, inconsistent with his relation

to a pure and holy God, or with his own high destination. His qualities and endowments, if well understood, show that he is "born of the spirit," and that he is "going on to perfection." He is endued with that wisdom and understanding, which are the glory of man. Though he may not possess in the highest degree the wisdom of this world, which is little more than a cunning and subtilty to plan and execute schemes to gain temporal honour and advantage, without any restraint from religious and moral principle; yet he has the wisdom to discover and secure his true interest, everlasting honour and felicity. The man, who has this "understanding, is of an excellent spirit." His mind is enlarged to contemplate the noblest objects. His knowledge is infinitely more valuable than that of ancient or modern philosophers, who have either denied or been unacquainted with the true God. It is conversant with subjects of the most sublime nature, which have a tendency, not only to extend his conceptions and elevate his views, but to transform him into the same image. He contemplates that infinite Being, whose matchless perfections and works fill him with admiration, and call into exercise the best affections and powers of his

soul. The law of God, which he studies, understands, and observes, makes him wiser than the sages of any age, who have been strangers to pure religion. "It is deservedly accounted an excellent piece of knowledge," says Dr. Tillotson, "to understand the laws of the land, the customs of the country we live in; how much more to know the statutes of heaven, the eternal laws of righteousness, the will of the universal monarch, and the customs of that country where we hope to live forever?" Far indeed does this knowledge exceed that which is confined to earthly objects, or extends to the whole material system, and embraces as much of it, as any human intellect ever did. It is in its nature sublime, and it prepares a person to intermeddle with all wisdom, to attend with advantage to any science, for which his genius is adapted.

The knowledge of the righteous, in another view, is excellent and important. It is practical, enabling him to choose with wisdom, and act with discretion. He always prefers solid treasures to gilded trifles, eternal felicity in heaven to momentary pleasures on earth. "Happy is the man that findeth this wisdom, and the man that getteth this understanding. For the

merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies ; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her ; and happy is every one that retaineth her." This happiness belongs only to the righteous.

But the greatness of his mind is equal to the sublimity of his knowledge. As this is conversant with the noblest objects, so his thoughts are elevated above the little things of this world. He would feel himself debased, and find the source of his highest pleasure corrupted, if his mind were much affected by the things that most affect many of the great and the vulgar. Raised in a good measure above the frowns and flatteries of the world, he directs his thoughts and affections to God, the fountain of felicity, desiring none in heaven or earth in comparison with him. His contemplation of heaven, and the glories of its eternal king, in whose presence he hopes, after passing from this mortal state,

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forever to dwell, ennobles his mind, expands his soul, calms his passions, tranquillizes his inward feelings, and prepares him to preserve a dignified moderation and serenity in every vicissitude. "He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

This suggests another excellency of the righteous, nearly allied, indeed, to the one already mentioned, but worthy of distinct consideration. It is his magnanimity, his heroick courage, in action and suffering. Illustrious examples of the active and passive courage of the righteous are recorded in the eleventh of Hebrews. Nothing but conscious rectitude and trust in God could have sustained the sufferers, and imparted such dignity to them in their trying circumstances. The fortitude, patience, unshaken resolution, and firmness, of christians, under persecution and torture, have often astonished, sometimes confounded, their enemies.

The righteous is above that meanness of spirit, which induces some, through fear of disgrace, of pain, or of the loss of popular favour, to condescend to practices which their minds cannot justify. He is prepared to hazard every thing, rather than the peace of his conscience, and the approbation of his God; to do and suf-

fer any thing, rather than give up his integrity. Surrounded with the greatest imaginable dangers, exposed to the severest trials, he has a resource in himself, and is not greatly moved. "The righteous is bold as a lion." No terrours dismay his heart; for he feels that God is his friend, and the rock of his safety.

As the natural effect of this courage, this magnanimity, he enjoys the most perfect freedom. They who are of a contrary description, an opposite character, are enslaved by their lusts, passions, and appetites; and by the senseless ceremonies and customs of the world. With such persons fashion is the supreme law, as well in respect to their mode of thinking and speaking, and their treatment of religious and moral subjects, as in regard to outward appearance. When fashionable, they pay some external homage to the institutions of religion; but, let the fashion change, and, though they may feel no real prejudice against religion and its sacred rites, they seldom honour them by their profession and personal attendance. Custom controls the better feelings of the heart, the wiser suggestions of conscience, and keeps them from the house and ordinances of divine worship. But the righteous man feels a digni-

fied freedom from such bondage, a liberty to think and act like a rational creature, accountable to his Creator. He knows no restraint, but what arises from the law of the Lord, which converts the soul, and from the testimonies of the Lord, which make wise the simple. These, so far as their influence extends, release him from slavery to his lusts and passions, or to the fashions and customs which keep many from their duty, or draw them into the paths of vice.

The servant of sin, hurried into practices that are injurious, and which conscience condemns, is subject to the meanest slavery. "While such promise liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage." Delivered from such wretched servitude, such disgraceful fetters, the righteous is become "the Lord's free man." Religion moderates the blind passions, corrects irregular affections, restrains unhallowed desires, gives to the soul the enjoyment of itself, makes it master of its own thoughts, and free to choose whatever is right.

To these excellencies we add a meek, charitable, and benign temper of mind. He has not the narrowness of spirit to confine his views to

his own private interest; nor the vanity to think himself more deserving than all others of the smiles of heaven, and the confidence of his fellowmen. He does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, condescends to men of low degree, and extends his kindness to all whom he can comfort or assist. "He is gracious, and full of compassion; he showeth favour and lendeth." To "do good and communicate" is his delight. Nor are his charity and its effects confined to the little circle of his own family and connexions, or to those of his own religious sentiments, to the exclusion of others; but extended to every proper object, while he has the highest complacency in those he believes to possess true piety and virtue. Of this he does not form his judgment so much from their opinions, as from that holy life and conversation, which indicate purity and sincerity of heart. Good men, of whatever communion, share in his affection and esteem. Towards the children of sorrow and distress he cherishes a tender, generous sympathy; but does not, like the pharisees of old, do alms to be seen of men. Conscious that he hath done his duty, and relieved a fellow creature, he is satisfied, *though* even the object of his charity

know not whence the favour proceeded. If the giver be known, the gift is communicated in such a manner, as to free the receiver from every kind of mortification, and almost persuade him to believe, that, in accepting it, he hath conferred a favour on the donor; or, at least, to feel as great obligation for the manner of giving, as for the gift itself.

These excellencies place the righteous above his neighbour; they always merit esteem and confidence.

Temperance and purity form another part of this character. "He hath risen above the vaporous sphere of sensual pleasure, which darkeneth and debaseth his mind, which sullies its lustre, and abates its native vigour; while profane persons, wallowing in their lusts, do sink themselves below the condition of men."

This feature, rendered more observable by the contrast every hour presented, stamps upon the righteous marks of worth and dignity. The excellence of these virtues is seen in the contrast with their opposite vices, which degrade the human character more than almost any thing else that can be named. "One of the most *shame*ful and miserable spectacles in the world *is*, to see a man born to the use of reason,

perhaps to an eminent fortune, drink away
religion, his reason, his sense; and so ex-
e himself to the pity of wise men, the con-
pt of his own servants, the derision of his
dren, and fools, to every danger, and every
e." Nearly allied to this degrading but
mon vice, is that impurity of conversation
conduct, in which some appear to take pride.
vould be difficult for a person of correct
al taste and discernment to decide whether
impure communication, or habits of intem-
nce, be most offensive; they are in general
d together in the same persons; but either
t be extremely disgusting to those whose
ds are not lost to all sense of the dignity of
nal beings. Such habits the righteous man
r allows. He "is temperate in all things,"
s evidence of the goodness of his heart in
purity of his life, and by possessing his
tal and bodily powers "in sanctification
honour." Free from pride and arrogance,
properties of base and silly minds, or a gid-
ss incident to those who are raised, on a
den, to an unaccustomed height, and void
riminal ambition, he is courteous to all, and
ent with the station providence allots him,
obtaining honour and promotion only by

meriting them, and acquiesces in that obscurity and private condition from which he cannot rise without the sacrifice of his integrity.

Let me add, what gives peculiar lustre to the virtues of the righteous, he is a humble follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, copying after the moral perfections of the Saviour of the world. Taking him for a pattern, and his gospel for the rule of his affections and actions, he presses forward to the highest attainments in every thing praise worthy. This being the object of it, his ambition is not to be suppressed, but cherished, and is rendered subservient to the noblest purposes. As pure religion and moral rectitude form his general character, and give him superiour worth, he is ambitious to excel, to "go on to perfection" in a holy life. In this view he can never be too aspiring; for, in proportion as he rises above his irreligious neighbour, he will be meek and humble, charitable and beneficent, kind and forgiving, just and equitable, sober and temperate. The object of his ambition, the point to which he aspires with holy ardour, is not to gain authority over his fellow beings, or to reduce their character and situation to infamy and dependence; but to become an eminent disciple of Christ,

and to possess and exhibit the spirit of his religion. He despises none below, nor envies any above him in moral and religious attainments; the efforts of the one he will aid, in the progress of the other rejoice; while he strives "so to run, as to obtain the prize," to be so faithful over a few things, that he may be made ruler over many things, and enter into the joys of his Lord.

The superiour excellence of such a character, without drawing the picture of its opposite, which is daily presented in part, if not at full length, none can be so blind as not to see, and few so corrupt as not to acknowledge. It is perceived, and often confessed, by men of the contrary description, when they have no disposition, or intention, to honour goodness as such, or to bear testimony in its favour. The infidel, the wicked and profligate, who make religion a subject of ridicule, and affect to have the highest confidence in those that have none, when brought to the near view of death, a situation that rouses their attention, and allays their passions and prejudices, if desirous to find one with whom they can trust their private concerns, and those of their family, will look for him, not among their own party, but among

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those esteemed righteous. Thus they are constrained, notwithstanding the current of their conduct and conversation has been against it, implicitly to acknowledge that in heart they believe the righteous to be more excellent than his neighbour, the man of religion more worthy of confidence than one destitute of it, the christian a better friend than the infidel. This secret veneration for piety and virtue is in general felt, and, without their intending it, often discovered by those who have no pretensions to either. If, then, we have the testimony of enemies in favour of the righteous, given under circumstances that admit no doubt of its proceeding from the conviction of their minds, the conclusion is fair, that he is in reality, and in the estimation of mankind, more excellent than his neighbour.

But the inconsiderate are often dazzled and deceived by appearances, and led to attach ideas of respectability to circumstances that have no connection with real worth and goodness. This is more common with the young and inexperienced, than with those who have had opportunity to notice, and examine what passes in the world, and to learn how deceptive are the things after which many eagerly grasp. Every trait in

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the human character, which is independent of religious and moral principles and habits, will be found, on a fair trial, to be comparatively mean and unworthy of esteem. The aspiring mind, in order to obtain its wishes, and possess real and conscious dignity and excellence, must begin with the fear of the Lord, and devote its best faculties to religion and virtue. Here let a youth fix his attention; to this point let him direct the increasing energies of his mind, and he cannot fail to become truly worthy of esteem; and may expect to extort approbation from those who affect to condemn his sobriety, temperance, purity, and piety.

If these observations are just, how must we view that spirit which induces men to treat religion with contempt, or neglect, as a matter of indifference, a thing in which they have no personal interest or concern; and to scoff at it, and, if possible, destroy its influence? It is a spirit of rebellion against God, and of hostility against the improvement and happiness of man. Actuated by whatever motives in their attempts to reason, or laugh, religion out of countenance, they must change the nature of things before they can render its possessor as unworthy as themselves, and blind the understanding of men

before they can prevent their perceiving the difference of character.

Would you, my young friends, rise to dignity and true worth here, and to "glory, honour, and immortality," in the future state; you must not form your resolutions and rules of life after the examples of free thinkers, or of more free actors in scenes of folly and wickedness; but according to that perfect standard, which exposes their enormity, viz. the word of God, and the example of Christ; and of those christians who have imitated him, and shone as lights in the world; whose faith, piety, virtue, magnanimity, constancy, and universal goodness have drawn honourable confessions even from the mouth of wickedness itself, and commanded the secret veneration of the most profligate.

Youth is the period during which the character of the future man is, in a great measure, to be formed.—It is the time to plant and cherish the seed that is to bring forth the fruits of righteousness in advanced age. But, my friends, it is a dangerous period. Untaught by experience, possessing ardent minds, strong passions, lively imaginations, ambitious feelings, and aspiring dispositions, most of you enter upon the

theatre of the world. Unapprized of the deceptions to which you are exposed, you are liable to be captivated by the illusions of fancy, and, while eagerly grasping after the mere shadow of bliss, to lose the substance. Objects of sense arrest your attention, and prospects of enjoyment, never to be realized in this imperfect state, may occupy your thoughts, inflame desire, and chain you to pursuits unworthy your rational nature, and inconsistent with the hope of future perfection in blessedness. Before they apprehend the danger, the young are, many times, drawn into inextricable difficulties, before they have learnt what constitutes the dignity and happiness of man. They become indifferent to the honour of virtuous deeds, and to the shame of those which degrade their nature, and blast all the hopes to which they were born.

Thus exposed, and beset with temptations on every side, the best office which parental affection can dictate, or the experience of years enable us to perform, is, to invite, and if possible engage, your early and serious attention to the things which alone can save you from disappointment, render you amiable and excellent, and gratify every reasonable desire. Religion

and virtue, in principle and practice, will do all this. By religion I do not mean any particular forms of worship, nor that gloomy sadness, superstition, or enthusiasm, which some call by the name; but a reverential fear and love of God, conscientious regard to his law, lively faith in Christ, respect to the sacred institutions, rules, and precepts of his gospel, and an habitual disposition of heart to abound in all the fruits of righteousness. Let your minds be established in these leading principles of universal goodness, applying them to every relative duty; and let your whole temper and conduct be formed upon this plan, and you will possess a real excellence, and merit an esteem, which you can neither gain nor deserve in any other way. Let this be your object, this your course, this the eminence to which you strive to rise, and we will rejoice to observe in you a high spirit of emulation. Determined on this method to become great, honourable, and good, you can never cherish too aspiring a disposition. You may indulge a holy ambition to reach distinguished attainments, and resolve that you will not be retarded in your progress by the less vigorous and active, nor turned from the road of honour and felicity by an opposing multitude,

whatever be their pretensions to superiour wisdom, or their claims to your deference. The elevation, or honour, that cannot be gained and enjoyed without a sacrifice of religious and moral principle and duty, you will ever consider below your dignity, and fit for those only who have the meanness to accept it on such base terms. Adopt and keep this resolution of the psalmist, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments;" and, like that of the righteous, may your path shine brighter and brighter, as the dawning light, unto the perfect day.

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SERMON V.

WARNING AGAINST THE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS.

PROVERBS i. 10.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

THIS is the monitory language of parental tenderness and solicitude. Every pious father will be ready to adopt it, and every dutiful child to listen to the instruction. With equal affection and concern the virtuous and religious parent would guard both sons and daughters against the snares and enticements of the wicked. What he says unto one, he says unto all, *watch*, and consent not unto the enticement of sinners.

This subject is chosen for the benefit of *youth*. May this class seriously attend, while

n the discussion of it we offer several things to heir consideration. The speaker gives to all the dvice he devoutly wishes his own children to ollow. With feelings of tender solicitude, nown only to the heart of a parent, he is ready o say, and, in saying it, to drop the affectionate ear, and to raise to God the fervent prayer for is blessing, "My son," my daughter, "if inners entice thee, consent thou not;" and, ollowing the wise king of Israel, to add, "If hey say, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause, let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole as those that go down into the pit; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood."

But not against crimes of such a malignant and atrocious nature only, but against every kind of vice and wickedness, to which you may be enticed by sinners, would he wish to guard and fortify your youthful minds. To effect the object, it will be necessary to point out the danger, and the means of escape, and, if possi-

ble, my young friends, to interest your feelings in the subject. It highly concerns you to have your minds and hearts engaged upon it.

Ushered into being, and unapprized of what is before you, it is the natural dictate of the benevolent heart to suggest, that you will be exposed to numerous temptations, and may have many parts assigned you in the drama of human life; and, that you may be prepared to meet these, to offer the best lessons drawn from experience, and the oracles of God.

Man has but few inherent principles, by which to determine and govern his moral conduct. He is influenced by motives, and soon becomes, in a great measure, the creature of habit; and it is of the highest importance that the purest should govern and characterize his youth. He has, indeed, a native power of judging between truth and falsehood, right and wrong; and his discernment of the one, or the other, is always accompanied with an inward approbation, or disapprobation. Although, in forming the mind and fixing its sentiments, much depends on education, experience, and numerous adventitious circumstances; yet the native power of perception and judgment, called common sense, and deemed the principal char-

acteristick of rationality, must be acknowledged. By this power the mind is enabled to discover the principles of religion and moral obligation, and, when the matter is fairly proposed, to determine what is the duty of a rational creature. But, notwithstanding this ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, and our secret approbation of the one, and disapprobation of the other, we often disregard the decisions of common sense, are drawn from the right, and hurried into the opposite course. From our first entrance into life till we arrive at its utmost boundary, we are surrounded with objects of sense, which allure thousands from the path that reason and religion pronounce the most safe and happy.

Temptations assail us from every quarter; but none, perhaps, are more irresistible than those which arise from the examples and enticements of sinners. These have a baneful effect upon the youthful mind. Next to example, good or bad, the persuasion of those whose favour is desired will influence the judgment and conduct of mankind. According to the nature of the example, and to the object proposed, mankind may be drawn to the side of virtue, or vice. But evil examples and the enticement of

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sinners, being most correspondent to the propensities of human nature, are by no means least influential in forming the characters and habits of men. The young are most liable to be corrupted. Youth has its peculiar temptations, and in general receives the deepest impressions from external objects, and from the companions with which it is associated. At this period habits of virtue, or vice, are commonly formed, and example and persuasion have the greatest effect. When any habit has become fixed, there seems to be a disposition to resist every thing designed to change, or correct it. There is a sort of pride in adhering to the first choice, and in refusing to re-examine the subject. It is therefore of very great importance that young persons should be guarded and cautioned against the examples and enticements of the wicked, lest they be seduced into the paths of vice and folly, live in disgrace, die in despair, and sink into endless darkness and misery. The text is a caution, given by a father to his son. The mode of expression is tender and affectionate. By a father it is now addressed to his own children, and to every youth who may hear the discourse, which he hopes will appear plain and instructive. In treating upon

the subject a number of leading thoughts will present themselves, and demand, even at the hazard of being carried to an unpopular length, a distinct consideration.

The first thing to be considered is the fact that sinners entice others. This is established by the testimony of holy writ, and verified by daily observation. The author of the words under consideration was too well acquainted with human nature, in its various appearances, not to be well apprized what part sinners will act, and what the danger resulting from their examples and solicitations. Nor can any youth of common observation and reflection fail of noticing the fact, though he may not have perceived the particular danger to which himself and others have been, and constantly are, exposed. Review, my young friends, almost ever so short a period of your life, and you will find that, in your intercourse with the world, you have been beset with the enticements of sinners, and urged to comply with their wishes, to adopt their notions and practices. Your own experience, therefore, justifies the intimations of God's holy word, and, we fondly hope, prepares you to receive the admonition not to yield to their power of persuasion, to their arts of se-

ıction. The fact granted, which never can e denied with any appearance of truth and reason, it will be interesting to inquire,

In the next place, secondly, to what sinners would entice you, and into some of the motives of their conduct. To suppose they will persuade you to be virtuous and good, and thus secure a different and better character than their own, is unnatural, absurd, and contrary to universal experience. Their object, or, at least, the general tenor of their conduct and conversation, is to engage others to be their companions in wickedness, to draw them into the vices to which they themselves are addicted. As if by increasing the number of transgressors, and extending the dominion of sin and misery, their own guilt will be diminished, to use a pertinent observation of our Lord, "they compass sea and land to make one proselyte;" and often are not content until they have made him "two fold more a child of hell than themselves." Like the grand adversary of our race, they endeavour to corrupt the minds and destroy the virtue of those around them, and thus poison the only pure source of happiness. No means are left untried to gain their point, to entice others to silence the voice of conscience, and to

free themselves from every idea of religious and moral obligation, so far, at least, as not to hesitate about joining them in whatever course they are disposed to pursue. Some, having made greater advances in wickedness and impiety, carry this design farther than others; but every step tends to the highest presumption, folly, and criminality, to induce men to cast off all fear of God, to submit to no restraint, but to give the reins to every unruly passion. In faithful allegiance to their master, sinners strive to establish his kingdom, and extend his empire, by increasing the number of his subjects, and persuading them to prove by their works their loyalty to the prince of darkness.

But what can be their motives? This is a question not hard to solve. Their motives are as base as their conduct is wicked. It will be conceded, that very few choose sin for its own sake, or for its ultimate consequences. They propose to themselves some present pleasure and advantage, or the removal of some uneasiness which they experience. This will account for the general practice of sinners in enticing others to the ways of wickedness. The superiour excellence of the virtuous and holy, excites a continual uneasiness in their own bo-

soms; and this becomes a powerful motive to destroy, if possible, the ground of the other's superiority, and reduce his character to a level with their own. Religion and virtue, they very well know, exalt the human character, and command the veneration and esteem of those who want the resolution to cherish any principle and habit of goodness. Their conscious inferiority to the virtuous and good impels the vicious, not to change their own temper and manners, but to bring the others to their base standard.

Though so attached to the pleasures of sin, and confirmed in the habits of it, that they will not relinquish them for the purer and nobler enjoyments of virtue and piety; yet they are not satisfied with their own choice, situation and prospects. Far from feeling that they have acted with more wisdom, and secured higher degrees of honour and felicity, than they who have chosen to observe the principles of religion and moral rectitude, they envy their happiness, while they refuse to make a single effort to rise to the same condition and character. Can a baser motive ever influence the human mind? Detestable as it is, its influence is not to be doubted.

Though men debase themselves by the meanest vices, and abandon themselves to the grossest wickedness; yet they are unwilling to sink in the esteem of their fellow men, and especially of the more virtuous and reputable part of society. The idea excites painful emotions. But they know that, in proportion as virtue is honoured, vice is disgraced. Our good opinion of others is founded, not so much on their absolute, as on their comparative worth and excellence. Sinners, the viler sort in particular, making the comparison, at once perceive that they are not entitled to equal respect with their more virtuous neighbours, and, averse to a reformation, find it necessary to entice others into the vices that stamp their own character, that they may hold equality with them. Hence arises that levelling disposition so prevalent among the most vicious part of mankind, as much in respect to virtue and character, as to property and power. The wicked, whose evil habits have brought them into poverty and contempt, discover a strong propensity to reduce those of eminent wisdom and goodness to their own base standard, rather than to rise by an imitation of their examples. Envy, the meanest and worst of human passions, rankles in

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their breast, and hurries them into conduct as detestable, as the motive by which they are actuated. Though they feel a secret veneration for the pious and good, they sicken at the praise which such characters receive. The honours of virtue the most profligate desire; but will not secure them by cherishing its principles, and exhibiting its fruits. Hence arises the disposition to hypocrisy, to exhibit an appearance of religion and moral rectitude, and to make it pass for the reality.

Envy is an uneasy and sordid passion, which seeks relief in the destruction, or injury, of its object. But how despicable the wretch, who, wishing to receive the honour and respect of his pious and virtuous neighbour, instead of imitating him, and thus rising to worth, is content with bringing him down to his own level! How mean the spirit, which, having no desire, or design, to acquire a good reputation, seeks to destroy the good name and real worth of another by enticing him into vice and folly! How sordid the soul, that, instead of aspiring to any thing noble and good in principle and practice, is ambitious to extend the empire of sin and depravity! Such meanness, such sordid dispo-
sitions, may be attributed to all who, with de-

sign, entice others from virtue and religion, to vice and impiety. Conscious inferiority, instead of exciting a generous emulation, too often generates, or calls into action, those corroding passions, which banish the benevolent affections of the heart, destroy every virtuous sentiment of the mind, and furnish motives to entice and degrade the innocent.

But other motives operate. Wicked purposes are not, at all times, to be accomplished without the aid of sinful companions. Sinners, therefore, entice others to join hand in hand, that they may with greater ease effect their object. Many species of wickedness cannot be perpetrated by a solitary agent; and some that may be are not so alluring and gratifying without, as with a number of companions. It would not be difficult to adduce examples; but it is unnecessary; your own minds will suggest a sufficient number.

Another circumstance merits attention. Mankind, when engaged in scenes of iniquity, do not enjoy self-approbation, but seek a kind of justification in the consent of others to the same, or similar practices. We often hear persons attempt to vindicate, or palliate, their own conduct, by comparing it with that of others,

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than which it seldom fails to appear, in their view, less heinous. A desire to pacify their own minds, free themselves from all restraint, and justify themselves to the multitude, becomes a secret but powerful motive to entice others, not yet lost to virtue, into the same vices that have marked their own character. A course opposite to their own, and manifestly pure and good, is a tacit but pointed reproof, and will excite some unpleasant reflections, a consciousness of their own guilt. Determined sinners, therefore, feel an interest in drawing others into their own habits and society, that they may relieve their own minds, diminish that worth of others, and destroy the foundation of that esteem, which they are not content they should possess.

These are some of the probable motives of the sinner's conduct in enticing others; and they are as base, as their practice is detestable. Convinced of this, you will be prepared to attend,

Thirdly, To their methods of enticing others.

To point out all the ways and means sinners adopt to corrupt the minds of the virtuous, to lead youth astray from God and duty, and to *draw* them into degrading and destructive sen-

timents and habits, is more than we can undertake at present. But we shall notice some of the most common.

1. Their examples have a surprising influence. Man is an imitative creature, prone to copy what he observes in those with whom he is conversant. With youth this method is most successful; though it has an effect at every period of life. The examples that are set before us become, in a greater or less degree, the directory of our conduct, and often give a turn to our sentiments, mode of thinking, and moral feelings. Those of the wicked are an enticement to the virtuous. They may, at first, shock a person of real virtue, and be less likely to have an ill effect upon one of habitual piety and rectitude. But such a person is not wholly free from danger. He may be insensibly influenced by evil examples, when they have become familiar, and drawn into actions his sober reason condemns; such as he once abhorred, and such as cannot fail to be a source of future regret. Observation evinces the humbling truth, that persons of fair character, of sober life and conversation, whose consciences never reproached them with any flagrant wickedness,

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have been drawn by evil examples into base and unworthy deeds. If such be their influence, in any instance, upon those who have formed sentiments and habits of virtue, we may expect they will have a greater effect on those who are undetermined what course to pursue, who have had but little experience, and whose habits are not fixed. It is, therefore, of great importance, my young friends, that you should be apprized of your danger, and cautioned against that imitation of the wicked, which will destroy your best hopes, and give pain to the hearts of pious parents. But,

2. Not content with what they can effect by example, sinners use every art of persuasion in their power to draw others over to their party. They try arguments, plausible in appearance, to gain their point; and, when neither persuasion, nor argument, avails according to their wishes, they affect to despise those with whom they are unsuccessful, but whose character they secretly revere. A specimen of their reasoning will be given. When they would encourage an unbounded indulgence of the passions and propensities of human nature, they allege, "that the author of our being hath interwoven in our constitution those passions and

affections, appetites and desires, which religion and moral maxims require us to restrain; and that it can never be the intention and will of so benevolent a creator, that his creatures should not gratify, but mortify their natural passions and desires. The supposition," say they, "is highly derogatory to the divine character. What, will you pretend to the least reverence and love for the Deity, when you maintain that he hath planted certain passions, affections, and desires in your nature, which give pain, unless they are gratified, and yet forbid their indulgence? Absurd notion," say they; "their design is by the gratification of them to increase our happiness. You ought, then, to express your gratitude to the Creator by acting in conformity to his wise and benevolent design, as it appears in your make and constitution; otherwise you manifest unreasonable suspicions of his wisdom and goodness." Thus sinners, devoted to pleasure and criminal indulgence, silence their own conscience, and endeavour to entice others into the paths of vice. In favour of some species of iniquity they, by a strange abuse of it, allege scripture authority. By such methods they delude the simple, and ensnare the unwary. Their arguments for the unre-

strained indulgence of our natural passions, appetites, and propensities, drawn from whatever source, and however plausible in appearance, are perfectly sophistical and futile. Their falsity scarcely needs to be suggested to persons of reflection and judgment; nor does it come within my design, in a particular manner to expose them. But let it be remarked, that, admitting our happiness to have been the chief object of the Creator in the structure of our bodies and minds, and in all he hath done for us, it will not follow that it must consist in an unbounded indulgence and gratification of the animal passions and appetites. These, we allow, were designed to be means of preservation and pleasure; but, to answer their design, they must be under due regulation. They are not the noblest part of the human constitution, never intended to be the supreme law and rule of action, but to be in strict subordination to the superiour powers of the mind, to the rational faculties of the soul. If not under the control of reason, but gain ascendency over the intellectual powers, mental enjoyment and satisfaction, in their nature infinitely superiour to the highest pleasures of sense, can never be realized. In proportion as passion, in opposition to reason,

influences and directs our choice and conduct, we become restless and miserable. Every argument, therefore, for the unrestrained indulgence of the passions, appetites, and propensities of our nature, strikes at the foundation of rational happiness, and of the dignity of man; and may be concluded false and deceptive, though you should not be able, at first thought, to detect the fallacy. But,

3. Another method practised by sinners is, to dress vice in the most alluring colours, to represent it under a different character, give it a fascinating appearance, and exhibit all the evidence they can of their sincerity and satisfaction in their choice. Of religion and strict virtue they draw the most gloomy picture, and represent those who conscientiously adhere to the principles and rules they prescribe, as abject slaves, fit companions only for such as have no relish for the social enjoyments of life, or are so void of sensibility and taste, as to be incapable of any other than a negative kind of happiness. When the sinner has finished his dreary portrait of virtue and religion, and represented their votaries as superstitious idolaters, paying adoration to a God that cannot save them from the distress of religious melancholy, and who has not

the benevolence to free them from the pain of self-denial, or to reward them for it; then he rears the stately image of his god pleasure, and decorates it with every ornament imagination can invent. "This," says he, (and youth are apt to believe him) "is the only object worthy of your attention. This lays no painful restraint, is liberal to all, and impartial in the distribution of happiness." The better to gain proselytes, the devotees to this god put on the air of satisfaction and self-approbation, as much as possible, that observers may entertain no suspicion of their disappointment. But, with all their art and contrivance to conceal their real state, they seldom appear, when attentively watched, to possess that calmness and serenity, which are the natural offspring of conscious integrity, faith, purity, and virtue. Their pleasures are rapturous, their joys transporting, their delight exquisite, and their happiness exalted; and, if we may believe as they would have us, they know no alloy but what arises from the stupidity of others, who, as they pretend, are deprived by their scruples of conscience of all relish for true enjoyment. As a still greater inducement to yield to their solicitations, they endeavour to

persuade you, that the course they recommend leads to the certain possession of riches. "Come with us," say they, "and we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." These methods being tried, and proving ineffectual, sinners then, as we observe,

4. Affect to despise, and treat with ridicule, those who resist the temptation, and preserve their integrity. They charge them with cowardice, want of spirit and resolution to be happy; with credulity and superstition; with being restrained from true enjoyment by some imaginary prohibition of the Creator, or by some preacher whose living depends on his art in representing the innocent pleasures of life as destructive to the soul. This has proved a successful method. Ridicule and affected contempt have proved powerful weapons against the cause of religion and virtue. They have a very commanding influence upon the youthful mind and heart, unless early fixed in sentiments and habits of piety and goodness. Sinners understand the use and effect of these weapons, and often ply them with great dexterity. Though conscious of their own inferiority to the truly virtuous, they make these the subjects of ridicule, affect to despise them, to avoid their

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society, and to treat them as a degraded order of human beings, who are unworthy to be companions of men of honour, whose generous souls have a true relish for manly pleasures; by which they often intend criminal indulgences, dissipation, and dissoluteness of morals and manners.

Against these and every other method of enticement to sin, you are exhorted and entreated, my young friends, to be on your guard. You are constantly exposed, and can never be too vigilant. "Watch, and pray, lest you enter into temptation," and fall by evil devices. May integrity ever guide and preserve you, the blessing of heaven rest upon you, and the power of divine grace enable you to stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God.

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SERMON V.

SECOND PART.

WARNING AGAINST THE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS.

PROVERBS i. 10.

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

In pursuing the subject we shall, in the next place,

Fourthly, Offer to your consideration a general rule of judging the character of those who entice you.

It is not uncommon for the impious and vile to exhibit an appearance of sanctity, and pretend to eminent degrees of piety and virtue. They dress themselves "in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." By this artifice the young, who are unable to penetrate the secret purposes of their hearts, and are unsus-

picious of an evil design, are often deceived. By concealing their views, and professing love and zeal for religion and virtue, the wicked are often most successful in drawing others over to their party. If they can raise in the minds of those, with whom they are conversant, a belief that they are religious, they gain their confidence, and possess an influence over them. Under this character the virtuous pay them deference; and what they justify and practise, is concluded to be innocent and commendable, without comparing it with any established principles of morality. Many are betrayed because they do not examine the real character of those who would entice them to particular practices. Supposing it to be good, they conclude their conduct cannot be bad; whereas they ought to learn from the quality of the fruit what is the nature of the tree.

Though men may have the art and address to persuade us that they are good, we ought not to suffer them to determine what is right for us to do, without consulting our own conscience. This we are to respect and obey, as God's vicegerent in the human soul. No sentiment is to be entertained, or action performed, which, upon a fair examination, this does not approve.

If any urge you to that which, upon a clear and full statement of the case, your own conscience disallows, you have reason to entertain suspicions of his goodness, however high he may have stood in your estimation.

It is indeed possible, that a person of a pure and honest mind may encourage that which you conceive to be wrong; and therefore you ought not too hastily to conclude against any one who differs from you as to the fitness of some actions. But still your own conscience, not his, must be your guide. When he entices you to any thing notoriously and confessedly evil, his goodness, to say the least, must be very doubtful. By consulting your own conscience, you can determine for yourselves what is right, and what is wrong. When that forbids a compliance with any solicitation, instead of yielding to the judgment, or disposition, of another, and endeavouring to reconcile your mind to that which it perceives to be wrong, you should presume that he is in an errour, or that his motives are not so pure as you may have conceived. You never can be justified in consenting to a thing you apprehend to be wrong, because you are enticed by those, of whom you have entertained a fa-

vourable opinion. You are to relinquish this opinion, rather than to violate conscience; for it is more common for persons to be hypocritical, than for a man's conscience to judge that to be sinful, which is not so. Care must be taken to inform the mind, to become acquainted with the rules of duty God hath given. By the light of his word we are to judge of the fitness of any course of conduct. If by this, conscience determine that to be evil and wicked, to which a man entices you, there is reason to conclude, unless you have ground to suspect an errour in his judgment, that his heart is not right, whatever you once thought of his character. But we go upon the supposition that conscience is impartially attended to, as the judge of right and wrong, that the mind is not under a strong bias, that it is not interested, or inclined, to pervert the decisions of conscience; but disposed to understand the truth. In this case, from the very things to which they entice you, the real character of your fellow beings is, in a great measure to be determined.

There are exceptions to this general rule. You may be serious and honest, but superstitious; and others may aim to free you from *such* an infirmity; but you, not aware of your

own superstitious notions, may feel yourselves bound to retain them; and from this circumstance form a wrong estimate of the character of those that would persuade you to renounce them. On the other hand, they who would persuade you to any thing you believe wrong, may not be corrupt in heart, but erroneous in judgment. But persons of sober reflection will commonly discover when this is the case, and guard against false and uncharitable conclusions. These are exceptions; but they do not destroy the general rule of judging the characters of mankind. By it you may discover right and wrong, and the temper and disposition of those who entice you to evil; and therefore it can be scarcely a palliation of your fault, to say you consented, because, from your good opinion of your enticers, you had no apprehension of being led into vice and folly.

The wicked may persuade you to some actions which are materially good, and which are so in a moral sense, if performed from right motives. Nor ought you any more to refrain from a good action, because a supposed bad man recommends it, than to perform an evil one, because it is sanctioned by a person you esteem virtuous. When the latter entices you

to any thing confessedly wrong, he forfeits his character, and ought to lose his influence. "By their fruit ye shall know them." If this be corrupt, it is no breach of charity to conclude it proceeds from a corrupt tree. High pretenders to goodness are not to be credited on the authority of their own word; but are to be known by their works. Judging by this rule, it is many times found that they deserve to be ranked with the vilest sinners, because they have enticed others into the grossest wickedness. Their apparent sanctity and zeal in religion have increased their influence, and proved means of enticing the unsuspicious into dishonourable and destructive courses. Be on your guard, and consent not to their way; refrain your feet from their path.

The next thing that calls for your attention is, Fifthly, Wherein you may be said to consent to the enticement of sinners.

There are different degrees of consent. The highest is a complete conformity in temper and conduct. But those degrees, which are not so highly criminal, are wrong, and extremely injurious to the cause of religion and virtue. When you discover no disapprobation, or opposition, you virtually, though tacitly, consent

to the enticement of sinners. Nor have you any right to accuse them with unfairness, if, from such manifest indifference on your part, they say, "He that is not against us is for us;" and conclude, that you in heart consent, and will be induced by continued solicitation to do it in practice. It is not at all unlikely that this may soon be the case, if you are so wanting in virtuous resolution, as to manifest no abhorrence of what you deem sinful. If you are so irresolute, as not to discover an opposition of feeling and sentiment to what you know to be wrong, it is not to be expected you will long shun the practice of it. If you conceal, or justify, the iniquity of others, you will, in many cases, be partakers of their sins.

Some fancy themselves entirely innocent, if they do not conform, externally, to the way of the wicked, though they feel no abhorrence of it, and in no manner discountenance it, except by refusing open compliance with their solicitations. But this is all mistake. He who does not abhor, and discountenance sin, implicitly consents to it. His silence and composure encourage bold transgressors and betray a want of virtue in himself.

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The consent is still more complete, when, instead of any visible disapprobation of their conduct, or indignation at their attempts to entice you into the paths of vice, you discover signs of pleasure and satisfaction. An approving air, a smiling countenance, or even a look of indifference, will embolden sinners, and give them reason to believe you are almost ready to join them hand in hand. Such appearances would not be exhibited if you were not in some measure consenting, or very indifferent about their conduct. The face is an index of the mind. By it sinners read your feelings and sentiments. The countenances of those with whom they are conversant restrain, or render them more active and persevering in their attempts to extend the dominion of sin. There is no person, perhaps, who cannot rebuke, or reprove, by a single look. Strong disapprobation may be expressed in the countenance; and, when words may be improper, looks and gestures must supply their place. If they do not, what will sinners conclude, but that they have gained your consent? They who wish to hold a fair moral character often give encouragement to the wicked and profligate by their apparent indifference, or satisfaction.

We add, consent to the enticement of sinners is discovered by an evident fondness for their company, by pushing into the way of their examples, and even by not taking pains to avoid them. He who does not in some degree consent, is careful "not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, not to stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful." Not exercising this caution is a strong indication of a consenting mind, of a disposition conformed to their views and practices.

It is too great a compliment, something like consent, to suffer yourselves to attend without reply, or rebuke, to what they say and do, to urge you into any vice. To allow your minds to be shaken, and brought into doubt respecting the truth of scripture, or the lawfulness or unlawfulness of those pleasures and indulgences you have judged criminal, by the arts or arguments of sinners, has the appearance of consenting in a degree, and indicates a secret inclination to adopt their sentiments and manners, if conscience can by any means be pacified. In proportion to the doubt you admit, and to the strength of this inclination, every argument will receive new force, every art of seduction new aid, until your judgment is per-

verted, and you fall an easy prey to the wicked. The moment you hesitate whether to yield or not to the enticement of sinners, they have more than half gained their point. At the instant your resolution against it fails, the beginning of your consent is to be dated. The virtue that condescends to parley is not far from a surrender. The outworks are gone, and the citadel will be an easy conquest.

These observations prepare the way for taking into consideration, in the next place,

Sixthly, The extent of the prohibition in the text.

Upon this point, it is possible, many have fallen into mistake. They may conceive the prohibition relates, not to the common faults and follies of the irreligious, but to those heinous crimes mentioned in the context. To these it doubtless has particular respect; but it extends to every species of transgression. Some may imagine that the actual commission of the sins to which they are enticed is all that is forbidden. This is too great a limitation of the divine precept; for, as there may be several modes and degrees of consent to evil enticement, each tending to the highest, it is reasonable to conclude, every degree is prohibited;

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that we are forbidden, in any measure, to consent to that which is wrong, and commanded, with a fixed resolution, to resist every temptation arising from the artful insinuations, or more direct attempts, of sinners, to entice us to sacrifice our virtue, and with it our hopes and happiness.

We are to shun, not only those horrid deeds perpetrated by bold transgressors, to which we may be sometimes urged; but the more common vices and irregularities of mankind; and, lest we should appear to be on the part of sinners, discountenance them in every prudent method, and avow our determination to pursue a course of piety and virtue in spite of all opposition. We are not at liberty to bestow a smile, or nod of approbation, upon a vile person in the actual commission of wickedness; but our very looks should express detestation, not of his person, but of his conduct, and every gesture reprove those who entice us to be their companions in vice.

I would not, however, be understood to discourage an air of pleasantry and good humour in the company of the wicked, if it can be exhibited without apparent approbation of their vices, or consent to their evil practices; much

less would I be thought to recommend to the virtuous and religious that gloomy aspect, that sadness of countenance, which is indicative either of base hypocrisy, or an unpleasing melancholy, rather than of conscious purity and integrity of heart. Such appearances, when considered as the effect, or the necessary appendages, of religion and virtue, will prejudice beholders against the very name of christians. The inconsiderate are apt to take the picture of religion from the gloomy distorted features and countenances, which many of its avowed votaries are fond of presenting to their view. By such means religion is painted in false colours, is dressed in an attire that does not belong to her. They who are good, or would be thought so, by such appearances aid sinners in enticing others from the ways of wisdom, and in exciting a fear to be virtuous upon religious principles. Persons of the strictest piety, and who possess most of the genuine spirit of christianity, will endeavour to convince others that Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light; not that they are under bondage, or in chains so galling that every breath must be a sigh, every word a groan, and every look an expression of inward horror. Nor will they feel themselves

restrained from every amusement; from such as may invigorate their mental and bodily powers. They know that, in the course of divine providence, "there is a time to laugh and a time to weep;" and that, by prohibiting innocent amusements, they may provoke others to break over all restraint, to leap all bounds of decency and decorum.

But nothing that is vicious, or wrong in respect to season and circumstances, should be any part of your amusement. If any thing of this kind be introduced, you are bound to show that it damps your spirits, and gives uneasiness to your minds. This feeling you should be careful to manifest to those who would introduce that which is immoral, or even indecorous. The company that exhibits evil examples, and would entice and allure you to imitate them, you are studiously to avoid, and to reject their proposals with indignation. This is the course that religion and virtue will suggest; and it is by fair construction, enjoined in the text; which forbids every degree of consent to the enticement of sinners, and is applicable to persons of either sex, and of every age. But as youth, in an especial manner, are liable to be influenced by the corrupt manners and commu-

nications of the wicked, I proceed, in the next place,

Seventhly, To offer several motives to dissuade them from consenting to the enticement of sinners.

To every friend of virtue, to every lover of human kind, it would afford high satisfaction, my young friends, to observe in you a disposition to receive and follow the counsel of the wise king of Israel. But, when we consider the baneful influence the example and persuasion of sinners have had upon many, who once bid fair to tread the path of virtue, and rise to a blessed immortality; when we think on the strange enchantment there is in the company of the wicked; we may well be anxious for those exposed to it, and diffident of success in addressing them. The importance of the case, however, calls for our exertion, and claims your candid attention.

It behoves you to reflect most seriously on the subject, and ever to remember, that in consenting to the enticement of sinners, so far as to imbibe their sentiments and adopt their practices (to which every degree of consent has a direct tendency) you become their associates and companions in folly, are continually exposed to

the vilest arts and examples, lose your virtue, and all hope of rational happiness. Incalculable mischief results from the first consent to frequent their company. Associating with them will have an effect, and by degrees produce conformity to their temper and manners. Every serious impression and correct sentiment will gradually wear away, the checks of conscience become feeble, and your propensity to evil strengthened. Surrounded by vile companions, who are ever urging you on from one vice to another, and dissipating every serious thought that may rise in your minds, small will be the prospect of your repentance and reformation, and numerous the evils you must experience in this life, which are not felt by the pious and good. However great the round of criminal pleasures, you cannot avoid a consciousness of guilt. This will create a sense of inferiority, which will excite envy, and thus sap the foundation of your happiness. When you have once yielded to the enticement and seductive arts of sinners, you will feel that you are degraded in the estimation, not of the virtuous only, but of your very seducers, who are not less faulty, and as unhappy as yourselves. Having consented, and by doing it lost your virtue, you

will be directed by your ruling passions; and, without a vigorous effort to retrieve your character, and change your course, be continually sinking into the depths of vice and wickedness. Besides, the pleasures you pursue will pall on the senses, and in review will be more disgusting than religion and virtue, if these were in fact as gloomy and debasing as they are sometimes represented by those who would excite the highest prejudice in your minds against them.

The loss of reputation, to a noble mind a most painful reflection, is among the evils that result from a consent to the enticement of sinners. To this frequently succeeds the privation of health, and sometimes the loss of life. But, if capital crimes should be avoided, intemperance and debauchery, to which they are exposed, who join sinful companions, often incapacitate persons for the enjoyment even of their forbidden pleasures, and shorten their days. By consenting, they lay snares in their own path, dig a pit for themselves, and lurk privily for their own life. They run into innumerable dangers and troubles in this world, and subject themselves to the most distressing feelings and apprehensions at every interval of sober reflec-

tion. "They are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

But what are temporal evils, in comparison with what they must expect in that state of righteous retribution, into which they are hastening? "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." What is said of one description of sinners is in a sense applicable to all. "Their house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Destruction is in their paths. "The soul that sinneth shall die." This is the sentence God hath delivered, and will he reverse it? Have you any reason to expect an acquittal, if found among the workers of iniquity, when brought before the judge of quick and dead? The shame and remorse the greatest offenders feel in this life are but faint representations of what they will then experience. In the world to come horror and anguish will overwhelm their guilty souls, Those who are their associates here will there be their companions, drinking the same cup of misery. Will it then, think ye, be any relief to call to mind the days in which you shared with them in sinful pleasures? Will your friendship continue? and will you endeavour by tender offi-

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ces to mitigate each other's woe? Little reason have you to expect the future state of punishment will be the seat of friendship. All will be rage and enmity, perpetual discord and mutual crimination and abhorrence! As sinners entice each other into folly and wickedness here, and are means of increasing their guilt, it is not unreasonable to believe, that they will then be mutual tormentors. It is well known that when associates in any crimes punishable by human laws are arrested and confined together in prison, they accuse and reproach each other, and thus render their situation more wretched. Why should not this be the case in the future state? Weigh the certain, and probable consequences of consenting when sinners entice you, and you, it is hoped, will resolve never to yield. Reflect on the superiour pleasures and enjoyments, which must be sacrificed to guilty pursuits, and your resolution to withstand every temptation will be strengthened. The refined generous feelings and sentiments of the soul, which are the source of true satisfaction and enjoyment, find no place, the happiness resulting from conscious integrity is lost, the delights *rising* from grateful emotions of heart to God

are known no more, the society of the excellent of the earth is in a measure abandoned, and, what is still more, the hope of being hereafter admitted into the immediate presence of God and the Redeemer, and of joining with angels and perfected saints in everlasting songs of praise, will be destroyed. Every thing worthy of a rational desire is in effect sacrificed, or relinquished, by yielding to the enticement of sinners; and what can any promise themselves that will compensate them for the degrading service into which they enter? What can they propose as an equivalent for innocence, virtue, purity, and piety? Do sinners persuade you that there is no pleasure, no enjoyment, without their enchanted circle? They of all men are the greatest strangers to true and rational pleasure. Let those who have been seduced from the path of virtue and innocence into criminal indulgences be honest, and say if they have not been disappointed. Let them show the mighty advantage they have gained at the expense of religion, virtue, and character. Deluded mortals! this they will find a task not less difficult than unpleasant. The pleasures of sin leave a sting behind; those of religion and virtue, peace and joy. Say, is there no happiness, no satisfac-

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tion, to be enjoyed in the society of the virtuous and good? None, perhaps, for one who hath chosen to be a companion of evil doers. But sublime pleasures, increasing delight, and animating hope, are the portion of those, who are pure in heart, who fear God and keep his commandments. Be ye persuaded, therefore, my young friends, who have not yet been insnared, to guard against every temptation, enticement, and allurement, to join with the wicked in their folly; and if any have consented, let them be intreated instantly to burst the bands by which they are bound to their sinful associates; to forsake the foolish, that they may live. May the divine power and mercy rescue them from the snares of death, and raise them to virtue and piety, to glory, honour, and immortality.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The view we have taken of the subject will teach you, my young friends, the necessity of family government, and convince you that it is the duty of your parents, masters, guardians, and instructors, to watch over, counsel, and direct your course. Your want of experience, natural ardour and vivacity, the heat of your

passions, and, I may add, your fondness for novelty, expose you to many unseen dangers, and render you extremely liable to be drawn into folly and ruin by the enticement of sinners. If you are convinced of this, you will acknowledge that those, to whom providence hath intrusted the care of your infancy, childhood, and youth, ought to exercise their utmost skill and authority to guard and restrain you from the paths of wickedness. Are they not bound in duty to God, and to you, to watch, counsel, instruct, and govern you. Can you pretend, whatever your feelings of opposition may be, that parents and masters, or the heads and directors of any literary institution, in which you may be placed, would be faithful to their trust, unless they take care to preserve you from the corrupting influence of those, who would entice you to evil? When instruction, advice, and example fail to effect the object, ought they not to interpose authority? If God hath commanded you not to consent when sinners entice you, will you think your parents, masters, or instructors unreasonable, if they endeavour to enforce the divine precept? They are accountable to God for their conduct towards you, and can never be justified in his sight if they do not

use their influence and authority to preserve you from every evil practice, and lead you into the paths of honour, virtue, and piety.

It was a charge against Eli of old, on which was grounded an awful sentence against him, and his house, "that his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." He admonished and reproved them; but did not exercise the authority he possessed to restrain their wickedness. God therefore determined to cut off the house of Eli, and declared that it "should not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever." The sentence was executed; and is recorded for the admonition of parents, in all succeeding ages, to exercise their authority to restrain their children from vice and wickedness. Consider what is their duty, and you will easily discover your own in respect to them.

It will not be denied that much of the sin and folly of youth is to be imputed to the neglect of parents, masters and instructors, in not attending to the inclination and habits of those under them, and early imposing proper restraint. In some instances, heads of families, by their own instruction and examples, entice their children and domesticks into gross folly and iniquity. *How* melancholy the thought! If those, to

whom the direction and government of youth are committed, felt the importance of the trust, and would consider how much depends on the faithful execution of it, they could not fail to watch over those under their care with the most tender solicitude, and, as much as possible, guard them against every snare and temptation.

It is an important branch of duty, which devolves on all who have the care and government of youth, early to impress their minds with religious sentiments, with the idea of the divine presence, and to excite a dread of offending God, and a desire of approving themselves to him; to represent vice in its true colours, and convince them that it is degrading and ruinous to every human being. They should, at the same time, exhibit examples of piety and virtue, and the best evidence that these afford true pleasure and satisfaction.

There can be no doubt that youth are sometimes prejudiced against religion and virtue by the gloomy, or austere appearance, and indiscreet management, of those under whose care and government providence hath placed them. This is a great infelicity. It is an errour that should be carefully avoided. The parent, or master, should endeavour to persuade the young

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that the highest satisfaction results from true religion and virtue, that their honour and happiness depend on their shunning the society of the vicious, and keeping themselves pure. Children and youth should be taught to respect themselves, and not to degrade their nature, and pervert their powers and faculties. Parents, and others, on whom parental duty devolves, should watch, and, when occasion requires, interpose their authority, that good impressions may not be obliterated by sinful associates, and that the minds of those committed to their care may not be prejudiced against the lessons of wisdom, by the arts of the wicked.

You will at once allow, my young friends, that the admonition, or advice, in the text is proper for a parent to give to a child; and that, if given in sincerity, the parent must feel solicitous to enforce it, and give it a practical influence, by every mean in his power. You must therefore perceive and confess in the next place,

2. That it is your duty to receive the advice, and to submit to the authority by which the parent would enforce its practical observance. Whatever the parent, master, or instructor, is *in duty* bound to enjoin, youth are not at liber-

ty to resist, or censure; but must be under obligation to observe and obey. Contempt of parental authority and government, disobedience and opposition to the regulations of families, schools and seminaries, are among the vices and follies into which sinners entice their more virtuous companions. Their first efforts are often directed to this object; which, in many instances, is too easily accomplished. Youth are disposed to live and act without control, to manifest impatience under any kind of restraint, and to think they are more capable of directing their own choice and conduct, than their parents, or instructors. They frequently imagine, without the least reason, that parents, masters, governours, or instructors, have an interest opposite to theirs, and that they impose restraint, or establish rules of conduct, to gratify their own humour, and not for the benefit of those under their care. This is, in general, a most groundless suspicion, arising from a predisposition of mind, which gives great advantage to those sinners, who are determined opposers to order and government in families, schools, and other literary institutions, and enables them to gain an extensive consent to their enticement to evil. That they may possess this advantage,

sinners will, if possible, excite such suspicion in minds that never entertained it, and produce impatience under a government they before esteemed mild, equitable, and good. The consequence is dissatisfaction and resentment at the exercise of the authority God and nature have committed to heads of families, and of such institutions, for the benefit of those placed under their inspection and government. But, my young friends, every expression of this dissatisfaction and resentment, more especially every act of opposition and resistance, under parental discipline and restraint, or under the laws and regulations of the institutions in which you may be placed for your improvement, indicates a perverse temper, and leaves very little reason to believe you will resist the enticement of sinners, to whatever folly and excess it may lead. It is their wish to excite a spirit of hostility in your bosoms against your best friends, and to flatter you with the idea that you are capable of self-government, and that it is mean to submit to the direction and control of any authority but your own reason and inclination. But this is contrary to the order of nature, and to the happiness of society. Parents were no more obliged to guard your infancy, than they are to guide

your youthful steps; and filial duty requires your submission to their authority and direction. Weigh and apply the subject, and you will, in this respect, guard against the enticement of sinners. But,

3. As you possess a power of judging, and have a rule by which to determine what is right, and what wrong; as you are in danger of consenting, in some, if not in the highest degree, to the enticement of sinners; and as every degree of consent is destructive in its tendency, and forbidden, you ought to examine well the nature of your conduct, and see to what it will lead or expose you. Pains must be taken to inform your minds, and respect paid to the sober dictates of your own consciences. You must not suffer inclination, as many youth have done, to blind your understanding, or to bias your judgment. You should suppress inclination, until you have determined whether its indulgence would be lawful and right. Nor ought you to consent, in any degree, to the conduct of others, if it do not first meet the appprobation of your own reason and conscience; if you do, you will be partakers of their sins. Look well to your own hearts, and be careful how you order your steps. Many have fallen by the

devices of the wicked, never to rise again to virtue and happiness. Shun their path, that you may not come into the same condemnation. We add,

4. That, as innumerable evil consequences follow a consent to the enticement of sinners, and as you are liable to be insensibly drawn into it, and by your example to draw others into the same snare, you ought to arm yourselves with the most fixed resolution against yielding, and watch that you may shun the rock, which has proved fatal to thousands. "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." If you see your danger, it may be avoided; and you must see it, unless you shut your eyes.

But, my friends, while you guard against the enticement, the corrupting influence and examples of sinners, be exhorted not to become dangerous companions to others, by your own improper conduct and conversation; but strive to allure them into wisdom's ways, to the love and practice of every thing excellent and praiseworthy.

That you may be preserved in the midst of the dangers that await you, and be guided in the way of truth and righteousness, humbly seek to God, through Jesus Christ, for the wis-

dom which is profitable to direct. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may stand against the wiles of the devil. Let your loins be girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel. Above all, take the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.

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SERMON VI.

ON THE DEVOTION OF THE HEART AND LIFE TO GOD.

PROVERBS xxiii. 26.

My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

My young friends, this is the endearing language of your Father in heaven. The sense of it is plain. God addresses you as his children, and teaches you the whole sum of your duty to him. "My son," my daughter, "give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Compliance with this demand is religion in principle and practice, in affection and conduct. If you would be truly religious, heart and life must be devoted to God. He requires your purest love, and your unreserved submission and obedience. In this discourse we shall *invite* your attention to the manner, subject,

and reasonableness, of the divine requisition contained in the text.

1. As to the manner, nothing can be more tender and endearing. The language is affectionate, and expressive of the feelings of a kind parent toward a beloved child. If you consider it as addressed by a holy God to his offending offspring on earth, it must make some impression on your minds. "My son"——What surprising condescension in the infinite Majesty of heaven, that he should own apostate man in this relation! With the pity, as well as with the authority of a father, he calls us back to our duty, and, to encourage our return, reminds us of our relation and consequent obligation to him. The expression intimates his disposition to own, and treat us as his children, and to grant us the privileges and inheritance that appertain to this relation. It teaches that, as an earthly parent desires the honour and happiness of his children, so our heavenly Father regards our welfare with a benignant eye; and that, as our fathers according to the flesh claim our filial affection, so he, who is infinitely more worthy and kind than they, requires our undissembled love. Every thing that the character of the most tender parent can suggest is implied in

God's addressing human beings as his children. The manner is gracious, and encourages our humble approach to him, as to a father, for every thing necessary to our own improvement and happiness. It indicates his readiness to forgive our offences, to pity our weakness, to supply our wants, to preserve our life, to direct our path, and to secure to us the inheritance of sons.

This compassion and goodness of God toward sinful men are strikingly illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. The conduct of the father toward his returning child, and the language used on the affecting occasion, represent the tender mercy of our heavenly Father, and his willingness to receive us to favour, and to enrich us from the treasures of his goodness. But, in order to our being objects of his complacency, and subjects of his favour, like the prodigal, we must return from our wanderings, confess our sin, give him our hearts, and obey his commandments.

This leads us to consider,

2. The subject of the requisition in the text.

This requisition consists of two parts.

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First, God demands the heart. "My son, give me thine heart." The nature and extent of this demand merit attention.

The heart is the seat of the affections, and the spring of moral action. In demanding this, God claims our supreme love, and the consecration of all our moral powers and faculties to his honour and service. The first commandment requires us to "love the Lord our God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength." This love to God, including its natural fruit, "is the fulfilling of the law;" it is the fundamental principle of true religion, and without it there can be no acceptable obedience. When persons give their hearts to God, they devote themselves and all their powers to him. The whole soul is inclined to him, as its chief good, the object of its highest esteem and most ardent desire. The affections of the heart are the wings on which it is carried toward God in the exercises of piety and obedience. Love, supreme love to him, which includes, or to which may be traced, every pure and holy affection, is the foundation and spring of all that is morally good in man. Different religious affections are only different modifications of true love to God, adapted to particular purposes; and may be

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traced back from their respective objects to the principle from which they take their rise. Evangelical obedience flows from this general principle, which inclines every person actuated by it, to do the will of God, and accommodates itself to every circumstance that attends the performance of duty. The love of our neighbour, though made the subject of a particular command, is a modification of true love to God, or naturally proceeds from it; and whatever may be its genuine effect, or fruit, is implied in giving the heart to him.

The extent, therefore, of the requisition may be perceived, if we attend to what we are assured will be both the effect and evidence of love to God, and to Jesus Christ. "If ye love me," said Christ, "ye will keep my word." The apostle John adopts similar language. "Hereby we do know that we love him, if we keep his commandments. Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Thus the observance of the divine law, not *only* in respect to the Deity, but also to our

fellow creatures, is represented to be the effect and evidence of true love to God. For the very reason that love inclines men to serve and place their happiness in the object of it, this precept is given, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." The heart must not be divided between God and the world. Supreme love to both cannot dwell together. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

In challenging the heart as his right, God claims our first, strongest, and best affections, and all those acts of piety and obedience, to which they incline the will. In giving him their hearts, or supreme love, persons devote all their powers and faculties to his service, resolving that, though other lords have had dominion over them, they will henceforth be the servants of the Most High, and direct all their views and desires to him, and to his honour and glory. All this comes within the nature and design of the requisition in the text.

Such affections, and such surrender of ourselves to God are required, that we may be like him, that his moral image may be reinstamped on the human soul. Pure and supreme love to

him naturally draws the heart into a conformity to the moral perfections of the Deity. We must exercise it, that we may be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. "Be ye holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." Giving him the heart, or loving him with all the heart, constitutes an inward resemblance of him; for "God is love;" his nature, his essence is love; all his ways and works are ways and works of love.

This attribute is the perfection of God's moral character; it is this that renders him infinitely glorious; and in this he calls us to be like him, that he may have complacency in us. This principle, so far as it operates, brings men back to the image of their creator. "A conformity of heart to God in love is the highest perfection of human nature, and therefore must be the sum of all religion." Actuated by such a principle, the soul will deny itself, and live to God. Mean, selfish, and unworthy views and desires find no lasting place in it; all tend to their proper centre, and are sanctified by the holy object, to which they are directed.

This giving of the heart to God is something more than those transient affections, which are sometimes drawn forth by particular acts of his

goodness. It is widely different from merely drawing nigh to God with your mouth, and honouring him with your lips! Can you, my young friends, suppose any thing less than an entire surrender of yourselves, any thing short of your purest and strongest affection, is intended, when God commands you to give him your heart? Will any thing, short of what we have insisted on, bring your souls into his likeness, and be acceptable to him? Will any thing, besides this supreme love, be a steady principle of holy obedience to the law of God? If not, as you must all confess, then the claim made to the heart includes every degree of love and holy affection, of which human beings are capable. This is the first part of the requisition in our text. The other is no more than the natural result of a sincere compliance with this; but it is made the subject of particular notice and command; and is,

Secondly, "Let thine eyes observe my ways."

As the former constitutes the whole sum of religion, in its internal principle, so this may intend the whole of it so far as it consists in external obedience to the laws and institutions of heaven. This part of the text is a figurative,

but pertinent and forcible mode of expression. It intends a careful application of the mind to the practical duties of religion, and such a wise observance of the ways of God, as shall teach and impress a sense of duty to him, and regulate the outward behaviour.

By observing the ways of God, as they are opened to view in the scheme of providence and grace, persons will be inclined more unreservedly to give the heart to him, and more attentively to apply themselves to the several branches of practical godliness. His ways are full of instruction, and may be contemplated with advantage, whether we understand by them the dispensations of his providence and grace, or the laws and statutes he hath ordained for the regulation of human affections and actions.

It is no uncommon thing for some people to imagine that religion consists wholly in the exercises of the mind, and for others to think it principally relates to external behaviour, to modes and forms of worship, and to regular and moral conduct. But both are essential to true religion. They cannot be separated without destroying its existence. He, who is destitute of love to God, has no truly religious principle; and he, who is not virtuous and holy in life and

conversation, has no genuine love to him. Principle and practice combine to form the character of a good man. As the heart must be devoted to God, so the life must be subjected to the laws he hath ordained for its regulation.

But it will not be a perversion of the design of the text, if we suppose this branch of the requisition obliges us to "have an eye to the rule of God's word, the conduct of his providence, and the good examples of his people. Our eyes must observe these, as he, that writes, observes his copy, that we may keep in the right paths, and persevere in them." We may observe the ways of God,

1. In respect to his holy word, which contains a perfect rule of faith and practice, and presents the best motives to piety and virtue. In examining this, we are carefully to notice the marks and evidences of its proceeding from God. If we observe his ways, we shall see that it has the stamp of divine authority upon it, that the proof of this, arising from its internal character, and from external attestations, is conclusive and irresistible in the view of all honest inquirers.

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The doctrines of revelation relating to the being and perfections of God, to his spirituality and holiness, his justice, wisdom, and goodness; to our relation, dependence, and apostasy; to the nature and consequences of sin, the method of recovery, and the benevolence in which the wonderful scheme of redemption originated; all these should be observed and contemplated, not merely as matters of speculation, but with a view to their practical influence. Let the eye of the mind be fixed on the ways of God in these respects, and the best affections of the heart will centre in him, and the life be devoted to his honour.

The divine word teaches us that, when man had ruined himself, God provided a Saviour, "who died for our offences, and rose again for our justification;" and who established a pure rational and practical system of religion and morality, which is calculated to form men to a spirit of holiness, and to train them up for endless felicity. This word is an inexhaustible treasury of the most useful instruction. It enlightens the understanding, enlarges the mind, presents a clear view of the most interesting subjects, and points out the duty and destiny of *man*. It furnishes rules and maxims to direct

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and edify the pious, motives to reform the sinner, hopes to comfort the desponding, and at the same time affords entertainment to the curious and inquisitive. In the judgment of some of the greatest geniuses the world has produced, there is no source of information and instruction, which affords so much light and satisfaction to the inquisitive mind, as the holy oracles. These present a striking view of the ways of God, and inspire the soul with the most pure and sublime sentiments. But,

2. The ways of God are to be observed in the conduct of his providence.

There is an analogy between the natural and moral world. As in the former it is sometimes fair, at others cloudy, sometimes calm, at others tempestuous, sometimes light, at others dark; so it is with the aspects of providence; they are sometimes smiling, at others frowning and portentous. Like the cloud that guided Israel from Egypt to Canaan, the bright and dark side of which were presented for their advantage, the different dispensations of providence are intended for the benefit of mankind. At one period God grants prosperity, and causes the light of his favourable countenance to shine upon his people with a steady lustre, that they may be

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induced to serve and obey him ; at another he frowns and visits them with judgments, that he may correct their backsliding, and recover them from their wickedness. His providential dispensations afford instruction to the mind, and present powerful motives to practical godliness.

3. In the examples of good men we may observe the ways of God. They show his power and goodness, and instruct us in the duties of piety and patience. The righteous are not exempted from trials and afflictions ; but, in chastening them, God *dealeth with them as with sons*. When, therefore, any engage in the cause of religion, if they meet with trials, they should observe the ways of God to others, that they may not suppose their own case singular, or their troubles beyond example ; but be encouraged to trust in the same power and goodness that have delivered, or supported, those whose life and character they contemplate, and be induced to imitate the virtues they notice with admiration, to exercise like patience, meekness, humility, and submission. In prosperity as well, as in adversity, they should observe how good men have been affected and behaved in a similar situation, how they improved the

smiles of providence, and acknowledged the author of their mercies.

But, though these things are to be carefully observed, yet it is with a view that the observer may be drawn into a right course of conduct. The principal and ultimate design of this branch of the requisition in the text, is to call the attention of mankind to the practical duties of religion and morality, to engage them in the study of the divine law, and in uniform obedience to its requirements. To promote this external conformity to the will of God the observing of his ways, in the instances mentioned, has a natural tendency, as by it men gain instruction, and discover the best motives to religion and virtue. This is the object to be effected. Religion in principle and affection must be reduced to practice.

The heart can never be right with God, if the life be habitually opposed to his law. That faith is dead, which does not produce good works; that love to God vain, or defective, which does not incline a person to keep all his commandments. Whatever religious impressions, or affections, any imagine they have experienced, there is no solid reason to believe they have given their hearts to God, unless they

are habitually disposed to the practice of universal righteousness, and do actually perform the outward duties of religion. He, that demands the heart, or our purest and most ardent affections, requires us likewise to keep his statutes, to do his wil, to let our light shine before men, in holy examples and practical godliness, that they may be induced to imitate our good conversation in Christ, and glorify our Father in heaven.

It is of high importance to realize in what manner we ought to observe the ways of God. We are to do it with a watchful eye, or with an attentive mind. His word and works are too interesting to merit only a cursory survey, and too deep and intricate to be seen and understood at a single glance. They are great and "wonderful, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." The deep things of God are to be sought out with attention, and contemplated with profound reverence. The reason why men are so ignorant of God and his holy law, is because they are not attentive to his ways and works, do not apply their thoughts to the subjects they are daily called to examine; but, through criminal negligence, lose the ideas and impressions they at times gain from a partial and cursory

view. If the mind were seriously angaged in contemplating them, and in seeking instruction in duty from them, its apprehensions would be enlarged, and its admiring thoughts dwell upon the amazing grandeur, proportion, contrivance, wisdom, and goodness, which run through the whole, and impress a sense of our obligation to serve and obey their author.

Believing, as we may with the highest reason, that the good of man is one great object of the divine administration, ought we not to contemplate the parts of it, which fall under our notice, especially these that more particularly relate to ourselves, with the most profound reverence and gratitude? When we see the heavens declaring the glory of God, the firmament showing his handy work, day unto day uttering speech, night unto night imparting knowledge, and the volume of inspiration opening to us the treasures of wisdom and grace, teaching us our duty, and pointing out the way to eternal life, can we avoid feeling some grateful emotions, which will incline us to that obedience which will be acceptable to the author of such blessings?

We add, the ways of God are to be observed with entire submission to him, as the righteous

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governour of the world. Knowledge is no further useful, than it relates to and influences practice. To know the works of God, to observe his ways in the kingdoms of nature, providence, and grace, to understand his laws and statutes, will be of very little advantage, unless it influence and direct our inward temper, and outward conduct. In observing and contemplating the ways of God, we are to seek moral instruction, to strive to know what is the mind and will of the Lord, that we may keep his statutes and his judgments. This is one part of the duty enjoined in the text. "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

III. The third thing proposed is, to consider the reasonableness of this requisition; which we have contemplated in two distinct branches, though they are inseparably connected.

1. It is altogether reasonable to give your hearts to God in the most full and unreserved manner; because he is infinitely worthy of your supreme love. Every possible perfection centres in him. To be admired and adored, his character and attributes need only to be perceived and contemplated. There is no real excellence but what is essential to God, and, in whatever subject it may appear, proceeds from

him, as its underived and eternal fountain. All that is lovely and desirable in man, or in the highest angel, is but a faint resemblance of his infinite amiableness and perfection in natural and moral excellence. If, then, God be infinitely lovely on account of his purity, holiness, and other essential attributes, it must be fit and reasonable for him to require, and for us to give to him, our hearts, or best affections. There is no other object worthy of supreme love, and, when we bestow it on any other, we go contrary to the dictates of reason; for these teach us to love that object in the highest degree, which is most worthy and excellent. To do this is rational, and would be natural, if the heart were not corrupted, and its moral powers perverted. But, until we can do this, our corruption will remain; and, though we possess rational faculties, we shall act contrary to reason. Supreme love to God is founded as well in the reasonableness of the thing, as in the authority of a divine command.

But, it may be asked, is it not natural, and therefore reasonable, that we should love ourselves more than, or in preference to, any other object? I grant it is very natural for depraved man to do it; but not that it is reasonable, un-

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less it can be proved that he possesses greater real excellence and amiableness than any other object; which it would be impious to suppose. Besides, that is an improper and injurious love of ourselves, which is inconsistent with supreme love to God, or which he hath not so woven into our nature, as to be an essential part of our constitution. When love is a rational affection and exercise of the mind, and not merely a natural passion, goodness and excellence will be its object; and as these are essential to the Deity, and exist in him in the highest perfection, he is the proper object of our supreme love.

But we need not rest the argument on his inherent perfections. His propriety in us, his authority over us, and his communicative goodness to us, prove the perfect justice and reasonableness of his claim to our hearts. We are his workmanship, formed and sustained by his hand, for the purpose of promoting his glory. As our creator, preserver, and benefactor, he has a right to our best affections. In demanding these, he requires no more than his own. He made us what we are, that is, dependent creatures, and gave us all our powers and facul-

ties; and therefore has an exclusive title to our purest affections and services.

Were man in a state of independence, there would be some reason to question his obligation to give his heart to God. But, my friends, you are every moment dependent upon God for what you possess and enjoy; and every hour's experience of the sustaining hand of his providence, and of his communicative goodness, renews his reasonable demand of your grateful love.

The gift of his beloved Son for the redemption of your souls from the power of sin and death, is a wonderful instance of his goodness and grace. It claims the warmest affections and gratitude. The blessings that flow from God, through Jesus Christ, who is able and ready to relieve all our moral necessities, and bring us to the possession of the joys of heaven, must impress on the mind a rational and lively sense of obligation to love the Lord our God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. The objects of such unbounded compassion, the subjects of such wonderful grace, can never exceed their duty in returns of love and grateful affection.

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As, then, God is in himself infinitely worthy; as he hath created you, and endued you with the powers and faculties you possess; as he hath sustained you amidst the dangers to which you have been exposed; as he hath, in a variety of ways, and in rich abundance, communicated his goodness, and made you partakers of his bounty; and especially as he hath sent his Son into the world to redeem, sanctify, and save your souls; can any thing be more reasonable, than that you should give him your hearts, your purest love, your best affections? On what rational principle, my young friends, could you refuse this, if it were demanded as a matter of mere gratitude and homage to so good a being, so kind a benefactor, so compassionate and gracious a Saviour? But, how much more reasonable the requisition appears, when we reflect, that supreme love to God is the perfection of our own nature, entirely consistent with true love of ourselves, and promotive of our highest improvement and felicity? If, then, this part of the requisition be reasonable, it will appear,

2. That the other is equally so, and is justified upon the same general principles. All that this intends will naturally result from a sincere compliance with the demand God makes of our

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hearts, or supreme love. Observing his ways, or keeping his commandments, is to act in conformity to, and under the influence of that internal principle of religion, which consists in a devotedness of the heart, and its affections to him. It is reducing the principle to practice, and thus proving its existence, and cherishing and strengthening it in the soul. This practical holiness, or conformity to the law and will of God, and attentive regard to his ways, are the ornament and happiness of the christian. They secure to him many advantages, have an influence on beholders, prove the reality of his religious affections, and promote the divine glory.

The religion, that has not a practical influence, that produces no good effect in the life and conversation, that does not regulate the external behaviour of a person, and engage him to be strict in outward acts of piety, in attending upon the ordinances and institutions God hath appointed, and in moral and social duties, is of very little value, and can never spring from true and supreme love to the Deity. It may be such as will sour the temper of a bigot, inflame the zeal of an enthusiast, and serve the purpose of a hypocrite; but it cannot give peace and joy

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to the mind, nor receive the divine approbation. Though there may be a form of religion without the power, an apparent regard to divine ordinances without a sincere desire to honour God by keeping them, and an outward conformity to moral maxims without any religious fear and love; yet, if these external duties of religion and morality be neglected, when there is opportunity to practise them, it is certain the internal principle is defective, that the heart is not devoted to God, or inspired with supreme love to him. Obedience is better than sacrifice; and though it must flow from the heart, in order to be acceptable to God, it must appear by outward conformity to his command, to his law and will, or it cannot be acknowledged and approved. In true religion inward affections and outward actions are so blended, that they cannot be separated, even in idea, without taking from it, in the view of a well informed mind, some of its essential properties. A sanctified heart and a holy life are alike necessary to the character of a good man. It is therefore as reasonable to require obedience in outward conduct, as to demand the purest affections of the heart.

The phrase in the text, "let thine eyes observe my ways," intends either this external conformity to the law and will of God, or such a careful attention to the displays he hath made of himself in his word and works, as shall lead to the discovery of his will, and our duty. The first of these interpretations supposes an understanding and performance of the divine will; the second an inquiry into it, in order that it may be obeyed. In either sense it amounts to the same thing, and enjoins practical obedience.

It is, indeed, a most reasonable and useful exercise of our faculties, to observe the ways of God in the latter sense. The psalmist prayed that his eye might be turned away from beholding vanity. The reason is, because vain objects too easily attract the heart, and too deeply engage its affections. But he, who attentively observes the ways of God, and inquires into their design and tendency, is kept from beholding vanity, is not captivated by the allurements that often ensnare, debase, and ruin others. The objects to which his attention is directed fill him with admiration, impart instruction, and afford delight. He perceives such light and truth in God's word, and such instruction in the conduct of his providence, and in the ex-

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amples of the saints, that he finds himself growing in knowledge, and prepared to serve the Lord with a more perfect heart and ready mind. The bible is a history of the ways of God to man, and contains the great mystery of godliness, which it behoves every one to receive and examine, and which is calculated to refine and exalt human nature. In it the attentive observer beholds a wonderful scheme of providence, and plan of grace, gradually unfolding from the fall of man to the advent of the Messiah, and the establishment of the christian dispensation. He finds that salvation can be obtained only through the mediation of Christ, and that faith, repentance, love to God, and obedience to his will, are the terms on which eternal life is offered. The wisdom and goodness manifested in this part of the divine economy excite his admiration, and impress on the mind a sense of obligation to notice and apply it for his own moral improvement.

The purpose to be answered by observing the ways of God, in this or any other respect, is, that we may understand his character and will, and become conformed to him in purity and holiness. Unless this be the effect, though we may be filled with wonder, we shall derive

but little advantage from our contemplations. But, with a view to this, our own reason enforces the duty enjoined by divine authority, and teaches us the perfect fitness of devoting both heart and life to the honour and service of God.

Having called your attention to the manner, subject, and reasonableness, of the requisition in the text, of giving your hearts to God, and of observing his ways, and keeping his statutes; as an improvement, let me remind you, my young friends, that the subject calls you to reflect,

1. On your relation to the great Parent of the universe. You are his children; and, as your Father, he requires your love and obedience. The tenderness he expresses toward you should excite a filial temper toward him, and induce you to prove yourselves worthy of your relation to him, by a conformity to his moral perfections and will.

Though sensible, that the human race have become rebellious children, that they have defaced that image of God, which was originally stamped upon them; yet you find, that he condescends to address you in the tender language of a father, and, in the most gracious terms, to

invite your return to him, and to encourage a hope in his goodness and mercy. He is pleased, like the father of the returning prodigal, to manifest a readiness to pardon and receive you, to treat you as children, and even to make you heirs of his kingdom. Think on your relation to God, and on his wonderful goodness to you; and then inquire what you owe him. You are not only subjects of his creating power, sustaining care, and providential blessings; but you are objects of redeeming love, and as such have the offers of salvation, through Jesus Christ, and the light of revelation to guide you, in the way of duty, to glory, honour, and immortality. Will you, then, disown, or act unworthy of your relation to God, when he, with such wonderful compassion and tenderness, is inviting you to acknowledge and obey him, as your father; and offering to make you partakers of a heavenly inheritance? If not, hearken to his voice, give him your hearts, and diligently observe his ways. Let him have your first and best affections, and his law your cordial approbation and cheerful obedience.

Our subject teaches, 2. That principle and practice, faith and obedience, affections and actions, constitute that religious homage and ser-

vice, which God requires of men. They are not to be separated, but united to form the character of a sincere christian, and true worshipper of God.

Be cautioned against mistake in this point. Youth are susceptible of sudden and strong impressions; and they often conclude from the violent emotions they have experienced, which arose from an uncommon agitation of their natural passions, that they have felt the power of religion, and actually given their hearts to God. Thousands have fallen into this errour; who have found, after the mechanical effect upon their passions had abated, that they are as destitute of the power and spirit of religion as they were before such emotions and agitations. From these it is not safe to conclude that the heart is renewed, and devoted to God. Supreme love to him grows out of just conceptions of his character, and rational conviction of his real excellence. It is not the result of a few feeble efforts; nor does it consist in transient exercises of the affections; but it is a fixed inclination of the heart and soul toward God, as the chief good, and the habitual exercise of the purest affections to him. These are a steady principle, or spring, of active obedience; without which you may be certain you have not given

your hearts to God in any truly religious sense. If you love him, you will keep his commandments. You will feel yourselves bound to observe and reverence all the ordinances and institutions of religion, and conscientiously perform all moral and social duties.

My friends, be persuaded to try and prove your own hearts by this rule, and not to trust to sudden impulses, to transient feelings, which are not accompanied and followed with rational piety, and practical goodness. You may be assured that, unless you bring forth the fruits of righteousness, you have no internal principle of holiness. Supposed change of temper and views, or fancied religious experiences, if not followed by a pious and virtuous conduct, can afford no well grounded hope and comfort. On the contrary, if made the foundation of confidence and assurance, may render your case more hazardous, by concealing from you the real state and condition of your souls. Beware of taking that for true religion, which is only the sudden and transient effect of animal passions.

But, 3. As it is perfectly reasonable that you should give your hearts to God, and observe his ways, or study and obey his will, be entreated not to neglect these high and important duties. The longer you suffer the world and its

vanities to engross your strongest affections, and to engage your pursuits, the more difficult will it be to fix them upon God and religion. Every hour's delay to comply with the requisition in the text must be a subject of future regret, and remorse. Let it, therefore, be your present determination and fixed resolution, that you will devote yourselves to God, that you will give him your hearts, observe his ways, and keep all his commandments. Attend to his word and povidence, strive to understand the wondrous things contained in his law, and the still more wondrous and glorious things revealed in the gospel of Christ. While you make him the object of your supreme love, and exert all your powers and faculties to observe his ways, pray to him for the enlightening and quickening influences of the holy spirit. He can furnish the means of instruction, open the ear to discipline, and incline the heart to wisdom. Wait, then, on the Lord, and commit your way unto him. And may he draw you with the chords of his love, guide you by his counsel, form you to his praise, and make you heirs of his heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ, whom he hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.

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SERMON VII.

CHRISTIANITY A MILD AND PRACTICABLE SYSTEM OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THE most groundless prejudices are conceived against the religion of Jesus Christ. If we believe his enemies, we shall suppose it degrades the human character, and imposes on its votaries unreasonable duties and restraints. The youthful mind, in a peculiar manner, is susceptible of these prejudices, which the artful and designing wish to strengthen. But the danger of imbibing them does not arise wholly from the misrepresentation of enemies. Young persons sometimes receive impressions unfavourable to religion from a defective education, and the indiscretion of parents and instructers. But, in what way soever the mind is prepossessed against christianity, nothing is more true, than that this religion is the most mild, rational and *pure*, that the world has ever known. It is a

dispensation of grace, which breathes a spirit of benevolence, and forms the soul for heaven.

If, feeling that he must adopt some religion, man were at liberty to make his election out of all the systems that have been propagated, the christian religion rightly understood, would have his preference; not only on account of its greater reasonableness and better hopes, but because it prescribes the wisest and best rules of life. None of its laws, none of its injunctions, are grievous. This is the sentiment advanced in the text. Christ assures us that "his yoke is easy, and his burden light." The meaning is, that his religion is mild and reasonable in its principles and duties, that it does not impose painful rites, require costly sacrifices, nor enjoin any service inconsistent with our happiness. In the two preceding verses Christ invites "all that labour and are heavy laden" to accept him as their Saviour and Exemplar, and his religion as their rule of life. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls." The invitation is to those that labour, and are heavy burdened, whether with the distresses of life, with

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a sense of guilt, or with the load of ceremonial observances other religions impose. With this invitation to come to him, take his yoke, and learn of him, he connects a promise of rest to those who accept it; and, lest any should imagine that the terms, on which the fulfilment of the promise is suspended, are not mild and equal, he assures us that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

In this concluding discourse to young people, I shall endeavour to illustrate and enforce the general truth suggested in the text; which is, that christianity is a religion that imposes no hard and unreasonable duties, or restraints; but requires an easy and rational service. The points, to which I shall call your attention, are these; that Christ's disciples are subject to government; that this government is mild and good; and that the restraints it imposes contribute to the happiness of man in this life.

I. Christ's disciples are subject to government. *Christians* are "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." They are to be in subjection to him, and make his gospel the rule of their life. His precepts and prohibitions they are bound to observe. He has enjoined upon them moral and positive duties. In some

respects restraints are imposed ; and general laws are ordained for the regulation of their temper and conduct. These things constitute the yoke, and the burden, spoken of in the text; and they come into the general idea of the government Christ has established in his kingdom. This government, we say,

II. Is mild and good.

It lays the subjects of it under none but salutary restraints. The wise and good man will choose to be under the direction of christian rules and maxims, because most congenial to his temper, and conducive of his happiness. Their observance, far from being painful, affords inward satisfaction. He is persuaded that the laws of Christ's kingdom are suited to the state of man, and that, so far as he is governed by them, he shall be free and happy. In his estimation they require nothing inconsistent with the dignity and improvement of human nature.

Christianity requires a strict government of heart and life. It therefore operates as a restraint upon the passions ; but no further than reason perceives to be for our good. An unbounded indulgence of our passions would reduce us to degrading slavery, and make us restless and unhappy. It is the design of religion

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to restore reason to its proper authority, and to give it the control and direction of all our passions. When this shall be effected, we shall realize that Christ's yoke is easy, that his laws impose no unnecessary burden.

In its rites and positive duties, as well as in its moral precepts, christianity lays no yoke upon us, which we are unable to bear; but is mild and reasonable in its demands. Those, who embrace it, are required to receive baptism, and to commemorate Christ's death, by celebrating the ordinance of the holy supper. These sacred rites are appointed to be observed by every disciple. They are called positive duties; but will it be pretended that they are hard and unreasonable? Would submission to Christ's authority, in these instances, be bowing your necks to a galling yoke, and taking upon your shoulders an oppressive burden? A person, that has not the heart of an infidel, would blush at the thought of making any such pretence.

Christianity, in its whole structure and design, is a system admirably suited to the state and character of man. It requires no quality which does not afford satisfaction, and add dignity, to its possessor; nor does it forbid any disposition, or action, which would not debase and injure a person.

Supreme love to God, and fervent piety toward him, are injoined by the laws of Christ. Will any, on this account, think them hard and unreasonable? None will make such a confession.

We are commanded to love others as ourselves, and to do to them as we would that they should do to us. Does this furnish ground of complaint against christianity? Did not its great founder discover even more benevolence than such precepts require? Behold him suffering and dying for you, and learn from his example what ought to be your disposition and conduct toward fellow creatures. The duties you owe to them are no burden to him who understands his own interest. As the laws of Christ relate to the temper and conduct of others toward you, it is presumed you can perceive that they are wise and good; and why should they appear less fit in their application to your own temper and conduct toward fellow beings? Judge by this rule, and your objections will be silenced.

Self-government is another branch of christian duty. In this, perhaps, persons are most sensible of the restraints of religion; but in no instance does christianity more directly promote our happiness; for "he that hath no rule over

his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

Meekness and humility are opposed to our natural pride and high conceit of ourselves, and in this sense are restraints; but they are such as promote our own improvement, and evince the excellency of the religion which imposes them.

Christianity, it is true, calls us to some self-denying duties; but these are burdensome to those only, who attempt to regulate their external behaviour by it, when they have not cordially embraced its principles, nor imbibed its spirit. This however, is no fault in the religion itself; but is chargeable to the temper of their own minds, which this religion is designed to correct. Sin has introduced disorder into the soul of man, and subjected him to the dominions of lust and passion, to inquietude, to a sense of guilt, and to the fear and expectation of God's righteous displeasure. The gospel dispensation, or the religion Christ taught, is designed to remedy these evils, and, by the most mild and gentle means the case will admit, to raise fallen creatures to the enjoyment of the divine favour. This leads me to observe,

III. That the restraints, which christianity *imposes*, contribute to the happiness of man in *this life*.

In the present state of imperfection uninterrupted felicity is not to be expected. The highest we can enjoy results from an approving conscience and from hope toward God. Religion restrains us from those things only, which would destroy inward peace, and lessen the ground of hope. So far as it has this effect, it is productive of present advantage. The objection against christianity, that it requires us to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow the example of its author, proves the excellency of the system; for restraint upon the corrupt passions of the heart, upon the irregular propensities of our nature, is necessary to our enjoying an approving conscience. Shame and remorse will be the certain fruit of criminal indulgence. The laws of Christ are designed to prevent this, and to lead us to exercise those pure and holy affections, and to pursue that pious and virtuous course of conduct, which afford present satisfaction, and, in retrospect, will give peace to the mind. The prohibitions, as well as the precepts, are therefore a beneficial part of the christian system; and, so far as they are regarded, promote human happiness. A consciousness that we have been withholden from those things which are forbidden by the

divine law, though it may be deemed a negative kind of goodness, will be a source of pleasure. But active and uniform obedience to the whole law of Christ will increase our hope and confidence; and thus sweeten the bitterest cup of life.

The apostle John says, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." The meaning is, that obedience to the divine law is the best evidence, or the certain effect, of true love to God; and that his law is not grievous in its operation, but founded in the reason and fitness of things, and perfectly accommodated to the state of those, for whose government it is ordained. Solomon says of wisdom, which intends true religion, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace." By the mouth of these witnesses every word is established. Christ's yoke must be easy, and his burden light; all the laws of his kingdom mild, and even the restraints they impose conducive to present happiness.

As an improvement of the discourse, let me entreat you, my young friends, to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, to take his yoke upon you, and learn of him, that you may find rest to your souls. You must perceive, if you

have attended to the matter, that the common prejudices against his religion are entirely groundless. What these are you have probably heard from the mouth of his enemies. Some pretend that his laws are cruel impositions, that his religion depresses the spirit of man, that it is calculated only for the weak, melancholy, or miserable, who are incapacitated, by the particular frame of their minds, for the enjoyments of life. Others hardly allow that the precepts of christianity admit the possibility of uniform obedience. Some, however, entertain thoughts a little more favourable to christianity, and acknowledge the possibility of conforming to its general principles and duties; but they seem to think that the laws of Christ's kingdom are too arbitrary and oppressive; that obedience would be difficult and unreasonable, and hence satisfy themselves without attempting to keep his commandments.

But, be assured, my friends, that they, who entertain such unfavourable notions of religion, must form their opinions from false apprehensions of a matter, with which they are not acquainted. Is any precept of the gospel unreasonable, or impracticable? Is any thing impossible required? If not, the religion is in itself a

practicable system; its most difficult duties may be discharged. There are none, from which you need to shrink; none that can excite just alarm.

Will it be said that the impossibility of obedience to Christ does not lie in any particular instance of duty; but that it arises from the whole collective sum of duty? This is no objection at all, unless it can be proved that one command is in opposition to another, or that he requires us to perform one act or duty at the very time we are obliged to be engaged in another of a different nature. This cannot be pretended. In a collective view, then, his laws are not grievous. They are restraints, it is true, upon the turbulent passions and licentious practices of men, so far as their authority is felt; but these restraints, like those imposed by every wise and good government, are of the greatest utility.

If we limit our views to the present state, Christ's yoke is easy, or his government mild and beneficial. But, connect the present effect and the future consequences of submission to his laws, and it will appear that he requires no more than every wise person would, if he understood his best interest, perform for his own

sake. The reason is, because the precepts and prohibitions of his religion conspire to rectify the temper and improve the moral faculties, to draw forth the best affections and prompt to the most worthy course of behaviour, to procure respect and give mental pleasure. Christianity requires no painful austerity of manners; nor does it consist in unreasonable self-denial, in bloody rites, nor costly sacrifices; but in grateful love to God, lively faith in Christ, generous benevolence to men, and cheerful obedience to the divine will.

To suppose it will abridge present happiness, or that it is fit only for weak minds, or gloomy spirits, betrays extreme ignorance of its principles, design, and genuine effect. We need no further proof that the person, who cherishes such notions, has never taken Christ's yoke upon him, never entered into the spirit of his gospel, nor understood the laws of his kingdom. From such you are not to expect a fair and just representation of the doctrines and duties of christianity. Their judgment is warped by their passions and prejudices. If it were not, they would perceive that religion is the glory of man, and the basis of human happiness; that it puri-

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fies the heart, regulates the life, and refines every enjoyment.

My young friends, be persuaded to give the subject a fair and candid examination. Strip religion of every thing that does not properly belong to it, and it will appear as lovely, as it is important. Never listen to the suggestions of infidelity, nor to the objections made by the lovers of this world, and of its pleasures; but hearken to the voice of your own consciences. On the choice you make your hopes and eternal interest depend. If you deny Christ before men, he will deny you before his Father and the holy angels; but if you receive him as the Lord your righteousness, submit to the laws of his kingdom, and imitate his example, he will give you rest, and raise you to the joys of heaven. May God, by his good spirit, incline you to the study and practice of pure and undefiled religion, and crown your life with his richest blessings. May you be "in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and may "Christ be in you the hope of glory."

AMEN.